PPC STRATEGIST

100
ADVANCED TIPS
FOR PAID SEARCH PROS

FROM
A FORMER GOOGLER

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Contents

PRINCIPLES

PROCESS AND SETTINGS

REPORTING AND ANALYSIS

BEYOND GOOGLE ADS

Introduction

100 tips seems like a lot.

It seemed like a lot when I first sat down to write them… and many times during the process.

But then, I have had quite a while to gather them. 17 years.

During that time I've worked as an account strategist at Google, consulted in PPC for dozens of companies of all sizes, created Google Ads courses and - of course - managed many, many accounts.

The tips in this ebook are aimed at intermediate-to-advanced-level paid search practitioners.

Pitching to the right level of expertise is always a challenge…

The more fundamental the advice, the more likely you are to have it in your toolkit already… while at the same time, the more useful it is if it's new to you.

But I hope I've found a balance here, and I'm grateful to the wonderful PPCers in my Facebook group and my course, Google Ads Level Up, for their feedback, which has given me enough confidence in the usefulness of what follows, to present it to you now.

This ebook will not make anyone good at Google Ads.

Information is wonderful (PPCers know this very well!) but it doesn't hold a candle to the wisdom of experience.

There are 100 solid tips in this ebook… But there are far more than 100 challenges lurking in the wild.

Mysterious declines in conversion rate… logic-defyingly low impression counts… baffling disapprovals… smart bidding algorithms gone rogue, and countless other such challenges will mercilessly put you to the test.

Wading through these and dusting yourself off is what makes a good PPCer.

All of which to say, man cannot live on data alone.

…Which is fortunate, given that the level and precision of data we have available to us in Google Ads has been on a steady decline for the last few years.

We now need to embrace the more varied diet of strategy, adaptability, and a holistic understanding of what makes a business work online.

So the tips under the section 'Principles' also offer some perspectives on how to think about what you see in your account with a wider-lensed view.

Even here, 'tips' are not a complete solution for effective improvement…

(For that, you could try my course and membership: [Google Ads Level Up](#))

But they are actionable, quick, and useful.

Enjoy them - and happy optimising!
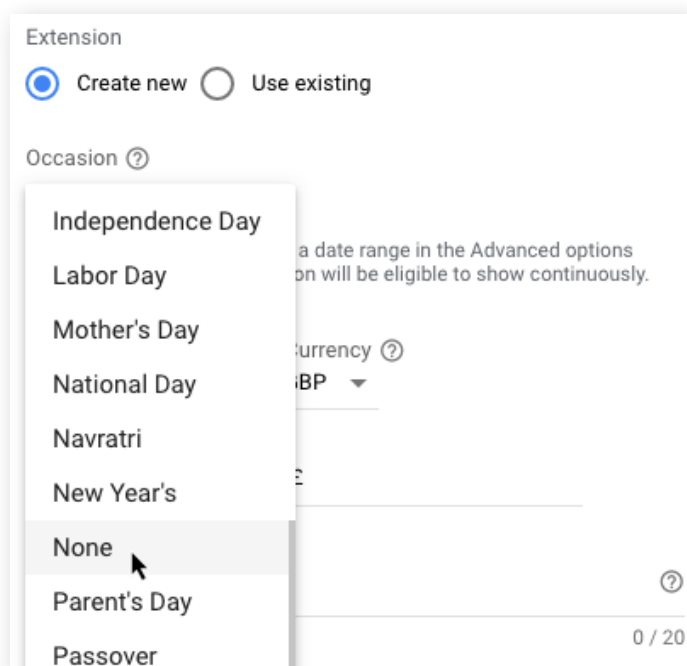
1 Extending The Promotion (Extension)

Promotion extensions are great additions to your ads when you're running a time-limited offer.

As with most extensions, you can specify a start and end time for them… Though take care not to mistake the 'date display' date picker for the extension scheduler, which sits under 'advanced options'. (I've done it myself more than once…)

But the advanced tip here is not to be constrained by your actual 'promotions'.

Promo extensions are also valuable when you don't have a specific sale or event in progress. Even if you just have a single product that's reduced in price (or any other excuse…) - create a promotion extension, select 'none' for the occasion

and your extension will appear with the word 'deal'
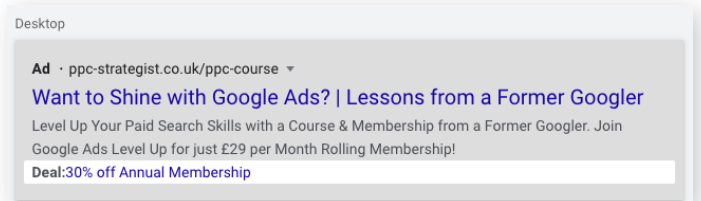
(or this little tag icon when it appears on mobile.)
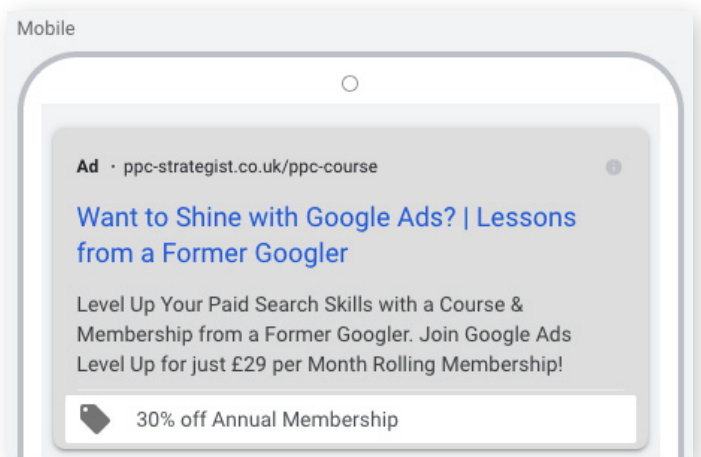
Quite a compelling addition to your ad!

2 An Extra Character in Your Text Ads

You've probably noticed the character counter that appears when you're writing your text ad in the interface… or in Google Ads Editor. There's an interesting wrinkle in the way it works, that you can use to your advantage once you know it.

If you end your first description line with a full stop, that punctuation will count towards your character limit. Remove it though, and the preview window will confirm that the ad will appear with a full stop regardless…

In other words, you don't need to enter that full stop explicitly. Leaving it out won't take prevent the full stop from appearing in your ad… but it will give you an extra character to play with.

This works both with RSAs and - while we still have them - ETAs.

3 Title Case Your Ads

Start every word in your ads (or all 'principle words'…) with a capital letter. It's a simple one - but it' makes a difference.

Consider which half of This Sentence Stands Out More…

You're not permitted to write your ad in ALL CAPS (and I wouldn't recommend it if you were) but title case just gives your message that little extra volume in the clamour for attention among the search results.

I've had the conversation many times about the merits of the more 'toned down' register of ordinary sentence case… particularly when the ads' audience is (or is hoped to be) particularly 'sophisticated'. But I've settled on the view - reinforced almost every time I put it to the test - that title case is the better approach across all types of account (and throughout the ad, apart from the display URL - which is a separate debate.)

4 Try Ending an Ad with 'Because'

One of the interesting lessons from Robert Chialdini's highly recommend book 'Influence' is that people are far more likely to comply with a request, if that request is accompanied by a reason, however vague.

Quite taken with this idea, I thought I'd try it by writing an ad (in a very high-traffic brand ad group) that ended with the phrase 'Shop at BRANDNAME because'. Strange, I accept, but I did this:

a) expecting my callout extensions - which were a list of benefits such as 'free shipping', '10% off your first order' - to make (logical if not grammatical) sense of the trailing 'because'

b) knowing that odd - and even 'wrong' - phrasing isn't necessarily a bad thing when it comes to attracting attention

How did it do?

This is the 'because' ad's results vs its near-identical rival, in its first full month after going live.

Ad	Clicks	Impr.	CTR	Avg. CPC	↓ Cost	Conversion:	Cost / conv.	Conv. rate	Impression>Conv Rate	ROAS
Official Online Shop | Discover The Latest Collection .com/shop/uk	24,228	47,456	51.05%	€0.10	€2,419.12	849.99	€2.85	3.51%	1.79%	2,308.58%
Official Online Shop | Discover The Latest Collection com/shop/uk … Fashion. Shop at Because:	24,234	47,005	51.56%	€0.10	€2,417.11	857.94	€2.82	3.54%	1.83%	2,377.07%

Runaway winner? No (though those incremental gains matter when volume is high) but it's an interesting test… and maybe you can find some other ways to put this idea - one of Chialdini's 'six principles of persuasion' - to use.

(For some other applications of Chialdini's principles in PPC, see my YouTube video on the topic)

5 Beware the Third Headline

In 2018, Google started offering us a third headline for text ads.

And to be honest, it's been a bit of a damp squib.
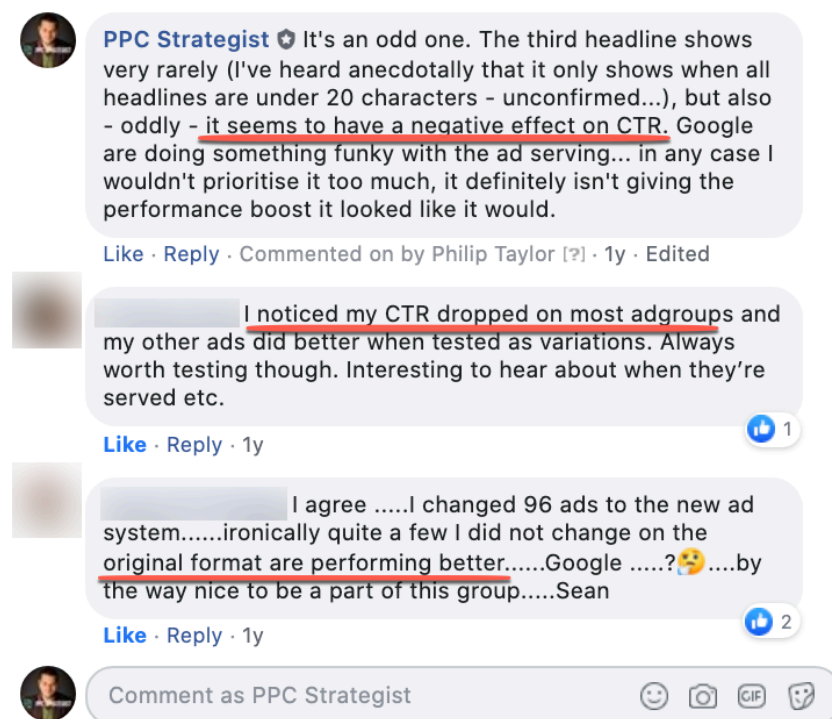
First, it doesn't often show up.

There are no stats we can pull from Google Ads to see how often H3 shows in your expanded text ads… but by checking the 'asset details' of your Responsive Search Ads, you can see performance for each headline-description combination rendered. If you look at how often these combinations include a 3rd headlines… you'll note that it's pretty rare (between 11 and 20% from a quick trawl through my accounts).

But worse…

It's counter intuitive, but H3 is often* associated with LOWER performance - mainly on the CTR side - versus running with just the two headlines. (*I won't try to put hard data on that, but it seems to be the case both in my experiments and anecdotally.)

Although you might assume that the opportunity to include more persuasive text would be an advantage… it may not be.

So while ETAs are still a thing, don't feel compelled to use the third Headline.

In RSAs, 3 headlines are required, but make sure you don't pin anything important to H3 - which again, usually won't appear, pinned or not.

Treat H2 as the end of the headline (which is a good place for your strong CTA) - as it probably WILL be the end of the headline.

6 An ETA by Any Other Name…

Along similar lines, Responsive Search Ads often perform worse than standard (expanded) text ads, particularly on conversion rate.

Brad Geddes of Adalysis has carried out some excellent work on this topic, and come up with a [convincing theory](#) as to why this might be.

The idea is that RSAs self-optimise with a heavy weighting click through rate. They evolve by finding and repeating those elements that raise the ad's CTR… but this often comes at the expense of conversion rate, as those qualifying elements that might decrease CTR but increase conversion rate (hard CTAs / price) get jettisoned along the way.

So when RSAs are the only option for new ads (i.e. now if you're reading after June 2022…) consider recreating an ETA by inputting only the minimum number of assets, and pinning your first and second headlines and description lines.

Google will show its disapproval with a low 'Ad Strength', but as things stand, Ad Strength has no positive correlation either with Quality Score or with performance itself! (see PPC Hero's [Ad Strength experiment](#) for one of the sources on this)

7 Don't Bite Off More Than RSA Can Chew

RSAs have great potential to harness the power of machine learning.

To give them an opportunity to discover the best matches of ad text combination to particular auctions, they will need a good variety of text lines, and a bucket-load of data…

But the greater the number of lines they have at their disposal, the more data they will need to build proper pattern analysis.

Keep in mind that the 15 headlines alone would require almost 3000 impressions to cycle just once through every two and three line combination possible…

One impression each… and that's just the headlines….

So unless you're dealing with extraordinary search volumes, there simply won't be a strong-enough signal for high-confidence patterns. At least, not in a reasonable time frame.

A practical upshot of this is that maximising the number of variations won't necessarily give RSAs the best chance to optimise. With normal search volumes, a smaller array of well-differentiated lines may be more effective.

8 DKI Everywhere

Dynamic keyword insertion (now officially just called 'keyword insertion') has slightly fallen out of favour over the last few years. It's sometimes seen as a lazy approach to patching up an overly-aggregated structure... A poor substitute for genuine, tailor-made match between search-term and messaging.

That's a bit unfair if you ask me...
DKI remains an extremely useful way to ensure relevance and appeal in your ads (unless you're using SKAGs - which I don't usually recommend (see tip #38)).

But how often do you use DKI outside of the headline?

The keyword can be inserted into any visible part of the ad.

Not only could using DKI in the description make your ad stand out in an unusual way... but if your keywords are on the longer side, it might be your only genuine opportunity to insert them within character limits.

It's an option to remember...

9 Customising the Location

Have you ever seen an ad with very location-specific text, that ALMOST looked like it was using DKI... but wasn't quite matching a keyword...

Say you searched 'pizza chiswick'.. and were served an ad with 'Hungry in Chiswick? Order your pizza in W4 tonight'.
It's got 'Chiswick', 'pizza' and 'w4'... but they're broken up in a natural sentence - not inserted in keyword form...
This COULD be achieved with multiple ad groups - one for each micro-location - but if those locations are granular and numerous, that wouldn't be a great solution.

More likely, it's the nifty feature, location insertion.

This has been available for ETAs through Ad Customizers for some time (though it has always been a pain to setup).

Ad Customizers don't work in quite the same way for RSAs, but their out-of-the box Location Insertion feature is even easier to use.

Simply insert the code (e.g. {LOCATION(City)}) and have the user's City, State or Country reflected back to them in the ad!

AUDIENCES

10 Add Audiences on Observation...

Adding audiences on observation is a generally useful thing to do. There's nothing to lose from adding them all and seeing what patterns emerge, that you might then want to act on. Nothing, that is, apart from the muddying effects of 'too much data'... avoid this by selecting 10-20 audiences that you expect to have some correlation with performance.

But there's a more tangible benefit to observation audiences which is easily overlooked.

While smart bidding algorithms can make use of the 'built-in' audiences ('in-market' / 'affinity'...) unaided, they can only tap into your own audiences (remarketing / customer-match...) once you create and add them to the ad group or campaign in question.

Adding these audiences on observation isn't then just an act of observation... it genuinely increases the range of signals available to the algorithms, giving them more to work with, and a better chance of navigating to a profitable state.

11 ...Including Poor Ones

Audiences that turn out to represent an underperforming segment are (at least) as useful to identify as those that outdo the average.

Once they have been isolated, you - or the smart bidding algorithms - can reduce bids for them or exclude them altogether to improve overall cost-efficiency.

In search of these profit-drainers, you could try adding / observing 'similar to' audiences based on users who bounced, or showed other unhelpful behaviours, to see if you can identify new unprofitable cohorts to spend less money on.

12 **Universal Audiences**

Just as there are sets of 'almost universal' negative keywords worth adding - the same is true for audiences.

Certain user segments are more - or less - likely to convert in general. The generalisations becomes increasingly reliable the further you drill down into an industry or sub-vertical.... but two of the highest-level winners and loser are:

In-Market: Travel
Travel audiences are more than averagely high on disposable income (very often a prerequisite for converting) and can often be seen heavily outperforming the average in campaigns for products like high-end kitchens, whim purchases, and anything where spare cash increases the prospect of buying (i.e. most industries!)"

In-Market: Employment
Those in this audience are more than averagely likely to be seeking a job. This is not only likely to be associated with a lower propensity to spend on a whim - or to spend big - but also slightly increases the likelihood that the user is visiting to scope out an employment opportunity rather than a purchase opportunity.

Just as 'jobs' is an almost universally-useful negative keyword, excluding *in-market employment* often increases the average click quality.

p.s.. Generalisations like this may seem distastefully close to discrimination, but it is (in my view) our job to make use of any disparities in performance, wherever we find them.

13 The Limits of Interest Audiences

For the last few years, audience targeting has become an increasingly central part of Google Ads.

But as the options and apparent precision continue to increase, how accurate – actually – is it?

One interesting way to gauge the accuracy Google's audience categorisation, is to take a look at the interests Google has earmarked for you...

You can see what interest categories Google associates you with at https://adssettings.google.com

If your interest categories are anything like mine, you'll spot a few that leave you scratching your head!

Take this sample from mine:

🎬 Animated Films		👕 Apparel	
📱 Apple iOS		⚗ Astronomy	
⊪ Audio Equipment		☕ Baked Goods	
🏛 Banking		🔷 Bars, Clubs & Nightlife	
🎾 Basketball Equipment		☀ Beaches & Islands	
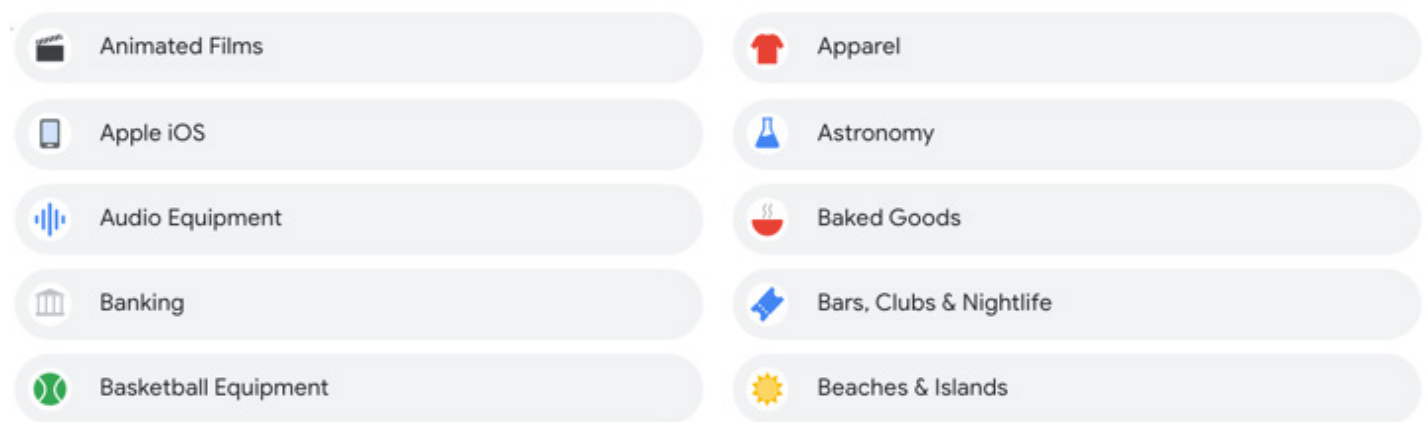
Of these 10, five are either genuine interests, or topics that I've knowingly browsed recently.

Two I can put down to my children borrowing my phone.

Two will have come from my activity relating to a sports brand client (basketball equipment...? Have you seen me?)

...and one is a complete mystery.

Seeing how hit-and-miss your own interest categories are will give you some idea of how far from perfectly Google matches users to topics. On an individual level, it doesn't seem to give a particularly accurate reflection of a user's interests.

But it's a lot better than random. So on aggregate (taking the 'signal strength' from a whole interest category group) the categories become a very usable tool...

Just don't imagine that they're anywhere near 100%. And remember there are some targeting variables (like gender/device) where you can treat the categorisation much more reliably than others.

14 Customer Match Plus

Privacy crackdowns are taking increasingly chunky bites out of advertisers' ability to track individuals over time, from their online activity.

In this environment, any tracking technique that bypasses the cookie becomes extremely valuable.

Customer Match (which is becoming more accessible, though there are still a few hoops to jump through in order to enable it fully) is one of the best.

The ability to target past customers (not just those acquired online) is underused, and under-appreciated...

But you can take it a step further still by isolating your highest-value customers (or your most recent customers, or customers of products in a certain category...) and uploading those lists separately for even more highly-specified retargeting campaigns.

And remember - any audiences like this also provide genuinely new levers for the smart bidding algorithms to pull (see tip #10)

BIDDING AND TARGETING

15 Avoid 100% Target Impression Share

You could argue whether each incremental percentage of impression share is equally valuable, but it's well worth noting that acquiring each incremental percentage is not equally cost-effective.

This becomes especially relevant when you're using the Target Impression Share bid strategy, and aiming for a high % of Top or Absolute Top IS (a common method for brand campaigns).

The last few % of top impression share usually come at disproportionately expensive CPCs.

When your IS hovers around 80 or 90%, those remaining auctions that you don't enter tend to be the ones that are more hotly contested… (There is a low-hanging vs high-hanging fruit dynamic at work in this).

Trying then to eke out the remaining few % can be an expensive business, and may not be worth the cost.

When you want to 'max out' with Target Impression Share, consider a target of 97% or 98% instead of the full 100%.

16 Embrace the Moving Target (Target CPA Tip)

Let's say your tCPA is £15, and - after a few weeks - your campaign has settled into a fairly consistent CPA of around £28, spending your full daily budget.

While you might intuitively think that the algorithm has found a CPA floor at £28, and respond by moving your target up to that level, the best move in that situation is to lower your target further.

By lowering your target - and increasing the gap between the actual CPA and the targeted level - you put more pressure on the algorithm to 'take its underperformance seriously'… and to start being more cautious, bidding lower, and being more selective about which auctions it contends aggressively.

It's fairly unintuitive that when the strategy is already failing to meet your CPA targets, the best action is to set a *more* ambitious target, making it even harder for it to do so… But *the wider the gap, the more urgently the algorithm tries to close it.*

Conversely, when CPA is below your target (i.e. overachieving) and yet the campaign is failing to make use of all available impression share, the move there is to raise the target - again increasing the gap between target and actual CPA.

This will nudge the algorithm into the expansive approach you're after, dragging the actual CPA up but – more importantly – pursuing more conversions, more freely.

> Watch **this short video** on the 'moving target' principle and how it works.

17 Test a Strategy First

Changing bid strategy can be a perilous business.

How a campaign will behave under a new strategy is ultimately not knowable in advance, and when things don't pan out as you'd hoped, it's not always possible to revert successfully to the status quo ante.

So when moving bidding strategy, test the impact of the change with a campaign experiment first.

Ideally ramp up to more than the usually recommended 30 conversions per month before doing so, so that you can take a substantial conversion volume with you into each of the two tested variants of the campaign.

Campaign variations aren't perfect, but they're a pretty good, low risk way to see how both Google and the real-world environment respond to a change, before you commit.

18 Bid Adjustments Multiply

Remember to watch out for 'compound bid adjustments'.

For example, if you bid up by 10% for mobile traffic; another +15% on Tuesdays, and another +25% in Bristol as the location... then when someone triggers your ad from a mobile, in Bristol on a Tuesday - you have a bid adjustment of 58%.

Add in gender, age, and audience adjustments, and as you can imagine, you'll quickly find yourself bidding way more than you want to!

OPTIMISATION TIP #1

WATCH OUT FOR COMPOUND BID ADJUSTMENTS

£1 BID

MOBILE | + 10%	£1.10
X	
TUESDAY | + 15%	£1.26
X	
BRISTOL | + 25%	£1.58

PPC STRATEGIST

There is a limit to bid adjustment multiplication, but it's 900%. The lower limit is -90% of the base bid.

So when making a bid adjustment just keep in mind what existing adjustments are in place, and use smaller % changes if there are multiple adjustments affecting the same set of keywords.

19 Leveraging Pay Per Conversion

Disclaimer - this one isn't exactly a search campaign tip... but it is potentially very useful for search activity, particularly with larger ecommerce accounts.

A good, economical way to build up remarketing lists ahead of a sale is to create display campaigns with the pay-for-conversion setting, and (to excite the algorithm) a high CPA target.

Clicks will usually be cheap with this method... CPA may be high, but total cost should be low, since you pay only for direct conversions, which are usually few in number... The real conversion action will come during the sale in remarketing / dynamic remarketing RLSA , and/or increased search activity

20 Targeting Wealthy Users

While paid search thrives on hitting the right users based on the intent revealed by their search terms, sometimes those users really need to be wealthy, to give you a shot at converting. What are your options when you need to hit high-net-worth individuals with your ads?

If you have Household Income targeting available (which you do if you're targeting Australia, Brazil, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand or the US) then you are in luck.

If not, then one of the most powerful techniques available to you is to target 'wealthier' locations.

The correlation between postcode and affluence is strong – so this list of the wealthiest location targets in the UK is a valuable tool for reaching affluent users: http://bit.ly/wealthy-users

They can be copy/pasted from this sheet, straight into Google Ads Editor.

NB The location targets listed are taken from a collection of sources (cited on the sheet) and rank among Britain's wealthiest areas, based on a variety of criteria including average income, % of households earning over £100K, house prices and others.

21 Donut Bidding

When running a campaign targeting a very specific location, the best way to hit the right area is usually 'radius targeting'... drawing a circle of any size around your target spot, to show your ads to users in the area within it.

How large you'll want that circle to be depends on factors including budget, the size of the available audience, and how proximity-sensitive your service/product is.

But what if you want to test the effect on your traffic of distance-from-source... or you need to target a relatively large area, but you're pretty sure that conversion rate will tail off, the farther out your users are?

This is where 'donut bidding' comes into play...

Target circles within circles, and set higher bids, the closer in you get.

Targeted location	Bid adj.	Clicks	Cost	Conversions	↓	Cost / conv.	Conv. rate
12.0 mi around (51.522414,-0.721900)	-8%	3,249	£6,800.04	93.00		£73.05	2.87%
6.0 mi around (51.522414,-0.721900)	—	1,421	£2,930.32	47.00		£62.08	3.32%
3.0 mi around (51.522414,-0.721900)	+20%	1,157	£2,493.52	73.00		£34.07	6.32%

You will often find that this works as you'd expect... as in the example above. The closer in to your target, the better your conversion rate and cost per conversion.

Results will vary, but whatever you find, you can use this new insight to optimise bids in the area 'donuts' you've created... raising them to make more of your better-converting traffic, and cutting them where your clicks become less valuable.

22 Shifting Locations...

It's easy to forget, but when you specify a location target that sits within another existing target (e.g. adding 'London' to 'UK', or adding 'Mayfair' to 'London') - the outer location becomes redefined as the original area MINUS the new, inner target.

There are pros and cons to this... but as long as you stay aware of it, it lets you compare your different locations' performance with more clarity... provided you aren't mixing date ranges before and after the location split!

23 Don't Use Adjustments as a Substitute for Proper Base Bids

Base bids (keyword or ad group-level bids) should be your anchor, while bid adjustments should be just that: fine-tuning on a bid that's generally in the right zone in its own right.

When bid adjustments are overused, you can quickly end up in a tangled web - with too many upwards and downwards forces - both multiplying and undermining each other - in too many different places. This weakens each of your bidding levers, and makes it hard to effect the changes you want.

Act at the level of the base bid first, to keep things neater.

p.s. If all traffic to a given campaign or ad group is bid adjusted in the same direction (i.e. bid reductions for all three device types) then it's definitely time to scrap the adjustments and recalibrate your base bids.

24 Know Your Unknowns

Although Demographic targeting for search campaigns has been around for a while now, it is still often overlooked as a simple – and powerful – optimisation tool.

Demographic reports often reveal a significant difference in performance by age range or gender. This doesn't always align with the expected demographic fit for your product... but if the data is consistent, then it's real, and it's valuable.

Differences in performance by demographic group – like any other variable – can be leveraged to improve overall CPA or ROAS with simple bid adjustments (if you're using manual bidding or Maximise Clicks) or by segment exclusion.

But beyond the defined demographic groups is another deceptively interesting group... 'Unknown'.

'Unknown' users are those whose gender or age Google can't determine with confidence.

Google generally assigns users to a demographic group based on their Google account settings. This relies on the user being signed in to their account.

Because of this methodology, the 'unknown' segment in demographic reports does not represent a random sample of users. Some types of user will be less likely than others to be logged into Google – for whatever reason - and therefore more likely to be categorised as 'Unknown'.

Being a non-random sample, we would expect to see 'Unknown' users deviating from the average when it comes to campaign performance... and typically, if you pay attention to your demographic reports, you will see exactly that.

		Age ↑	Bid adj.	Clicks	Cost	Conversions	Cost / conv.	Conv. rate
☐	⊖	18 - 24	—	2	£4.95	0.00	£0.00	0.00%
☐	●	25 - 34	+15%	3,130	£11,965.77	154.22	£77.59	4.93%
☐	●	35 - 44	—	2,081	£7,576.60	76.79	£98.62	3.69%
☐	●	45 - 54	—	1,647	£4,890.85	55.77	£87.65	3.39%
☐	●	55 - 64	-10%	754	£2,317.82	20.32	£114.09	2.69%
☐	●	65+	-10%	565	£1,768.76	14.27	£123.91	2.53%
☐	●	Unknown	-10%	4,563	£15,194.19	121.90	£124.60	2.67%
		Total: Ages		12,742	£43,718.94	443.28	£98.60	3.48%

The 'Unknown' segment often turns out to have a meaningfully different conversion rate from the average of the known demographic groups.

This is valuable to keep in mind, and to act on with bid adjustments and exclusions as you would with any other cohort, to improve your overall campaign performance.

But also remember that if you adjust for 'unknown' age, that will mostly also cover users of 'unknown' gender, so avoid doubling up within the same round of optimisation.

25 Bid Adjustments vs Bid Strategies

If you're in the habit of using bid adjustments as an optimisation tool, it can be easy to overlook the fact that they generally don't work with Smart Bidding.

There's slightly more to the story, in that certain adjustments have specific, different effects when used in conjunction with certain strategies… but for the most part, if you use smart bidding, your bid adjustments are ignored.

This table shows the details…

BID ADJUSTMENT OPERATION BY BID STRATEGY

*prioritises overlapping audiences for attribution
https://support.google.com/google-ads/answer/4782789?hl=en

BID STRATEGY	DEVICE	LOCATION	TIME	AUDIENCE	DEMOGRAPHIC
Maximise value	-100% only	✖	✖	✖	✖
Maximise convs	-100% only	✖	✖	✖	✖
Target ROAS	-100% only	✖	✖	adjusts priority*	✖
Target CPA	adjusts CPA target	✖	✖	adjusts priority*	✖
Target impr. share	-100% only	✖	✖	✖	✖
Maximise clicks	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Manual	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

26 Is Lost to Budget? Get Ruthless!

The precautionary principle can be a real impediment to optimising an account…

Too often, we tinker around the edges, not wanting to 'jump the data'… not wanting to lose traffic that's providing – or might yet provide – some nugget of value…

But being afraid to close any doors can keep an account in a stasis of bloated traffic, with unnecessarily high CPA…

Sometimes it takes bold moves to really swing that traffic in the direction of better-converting users. Instead of nudging bids down by 10-20% on underperforming segments, think about excluding them.

Ask, "Can we afford to lose this chunk of traffic?"

Often you can afford to lose that traffic perfectly well – more often than we give credit for (partly because of another of our natural biases: the tendency to overvalue the status quo… see Kahneman and the Endowment Effect.)

And if you're hitting your daily budgets… then lopping off a limb from your account may not even reduce your overall spend. (I.S. lost to budget gives you that 'starfish power' to grow it straight back)

> *'perfection is attained not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing more to remove'*
>
> *-Antoine de Saint Exupéry*

27 Cover Off All Your Targeting Variables

Beyond keywords and ads, there's an increasing range of variables we can use for optimisation. Devices, Locations, Audiences, Demographics...

When you're using manual bidding, this gives us a powerful array of knobs to tune up and down.

On Smart bidding - where the bid adjustments are generally out of our hands (though see tip #25 for the details) these variables still have an important role. We can exclude underperforming segments, and target the over-performers to the exclusion of others.

Here's a guide to all those environmental and user-based variables currently available for search campaigns, showing at which level of the structural hierarchy each one operates, and how to prioritise it.

VARIABLE	TYPE	LEVEL	POTENCY
Hour	(Environmental)	Campaign	LOW
Day	(Environmental)	Campaign	MID
Location	(Environmental)	Campaign	HIGH
Device	(Environmental)	Both	HIGH
Age	Demographic	Ad Group	MID
Gender	Demographic	Ad Group	MID
Detailed Demographics	Audience	Either	MID
Affinity	Audience	Either	LOW
In-Market	Audience	Either	MID
Similar	Audience	Either	MID
Remarketing / Cust. Match	Audience	Either	HIGH*

28 Seasonality Adjustments

While Seasonality Adjustments haven't caused much of a stir, this little control swings the balance of power some way back in the advertiser's favour…

Seasonality adjustments are a control - introduced in late 2020 - allowing advertisers a rare window of influence over the behaviour of Smart Bidding strategies.

Google describes them as 'an advanced tool that can be used to inform Smart Bidding of expected changes in conversion rates for future events like promotions or sales'.

(Find them under tools > shared library > bid strategies > advanced controls)

What seasonality adjustments let you change is the 'expected conversion rate' ('expected' by smart bidding algorithms, that is).

As you turn this dial up, the algorithms become proportionately more bullish. They bid higher, and compete harder, in more auctions.

This is something you may want the algorithms to do, regardless of whether or not you have a sale on. Conversely, when you want to cut spend but increase ROAS, a negative seasonality adjustment is another tool in your kit to help achieve that.

This feature brings back a small element of control with smart bidding… and while you could argue for letting an algorithm operate without interference, there are times when you know it's off track, and want to give it a nudge in a particular direction. Seasonality Adjustments let you do exactly that.

KEYWORDS

29 Keyword Overlap

(How to find it and how to deal with it…)

I'm not as strict on duplicate keywords as many of my fellow PPCers. While keyword overlaps don't add any value, they are not nearly as problematic as is often feared.

That said, overlap does reduce clarity into the job being done by each keyword… and clarity is important for optimisation.

So when an account grows, and its campaign/ad group structure begins to sprawl, you will want to check where your keywords are competing for the same clicks, and tidy up the 'division of labour' between your keywords where you can, so that you can treat each keyword as a properly discrete entity.

Here's how to find out where 'overlapping search territory' is cropping up in your account.

1) Open up the search term report, with a reasonably long date range selected
2) Add 'keyword' as a column to the table
3) Export the table straight to Google Sheets
4) In your newly-created Google sheet, lop off the first two summary rows that appear above the data, and – under the 'Data' dropdown – create a pivot table. (Don't worry… 😊)
5) To set up the pivot table, under 'rows', first add 'search term', and then 'keyword'.

Under 'values', add the metrics you will want to compare between the different instances (keywords) of each search term.

Impressions, clicks, cost, conversions, and revenue - if you have it - will all be interesting.

(Don't add CPC, CTR, conversion rate, cost per conversion or ROAS directly; they'll get skewed by the aggregation.)

Once the metrics are in, you can go back up to 'search terms' under 'rows', and sort by number of impressions, so that you see the significant overlaps first…

Search term	Keyword	SUM of Impr.	SUM of Clicks	SUM of Conversions	SUM of Cost
⊟ red bull racing cap	[red bull racing cap]	391	11	2.5	5.8
	+red +bull +cap	86	5	0.5	2.52
⊟ bmw tracksuit	[bmw tracksuit]	373	37	1	13.64
	+bmw +tracksuit	73	9	0	1.83
⊟ arsenal shirt english clubs	+arsenal +shirt	446	2	0	0.96
⊟ arsenal training shirt	+arsenal +shirt	445	11	1.4	5.48

Voila!

30 Context for Your Search Terms

When looking through your search term reports, don't forget to add the 'keyword' column - showing which keyword/s brought up each search term.

You'll see multiple entries for search terms where they triggered multiple keywords (a much rougher but quicker way to check search term overlap than tip #29...)

We may have less search term data than we used to, but this column makes the data we do have a lot richer.

31 Expanding Under Cover

Here's a good way to deal with the trade off between quantity and quality of traffic when you're looking to scale an account...

You can expand into new search term territory that might otherwise be too low on conversion rate much more safely, by doing it in combination with tight targeting from other variables.

In other words, you can try more generic, less tightly-targeted keywords, when you specify that those more loosely targeted impressions will only show to more highly-targeted users!

For example, use:

- ✓ Remarketing audiences (standard and customer match)
- ✓ Other highly-relevant audiences (including combined audiences, which can hugely increases their relevance by using the intersection of two or more different high-quality audiences)
- ✓ Proven top tiers from location / demographic / device values

In practice, this means creating one or more separate campaigns or ad groups for the broader-ranging keywords, with that narrow targeting in place, so that your ads are only shown to members of those tightly-selected segments most likely to convert. (Put audiences on 'targeting', not 'observation' for this.)

With this technique, your audiences are doing a lot of the targeting work, so you're a little freer to go for search terms that don't give such a strong a signal of intent.

Those broader keywords that were otherwise too generic, might now be worthwhile.

32 Don't Stress the QS

While Quality Score shouldn't be ignored, it is neither the indicator nor the determinate of success that it is often taken to be.

Quality Score is flawed... It is overly punitive of perfectly good setups, and far too unresponsive to real improvements (so if you've had that frustration, know that it's not just you!).

There is also the question of what's best for QS not always being what's best for performance.

Take the common dichotomy of CTR vs CVR.

Making an ad more widely appealing tends to improve its CTR, while attracting those additional (less 'filtered') clicks tends to decrease CVR.

With (actual) CTR being still the primary lever in QS - this makes the tension clear... There will be decisions where you can improve on your QS at the expense of the more direct route to cost-effectiveness - or vice versa.

And remember - you can not only to survive, but also to thrive with a low QS... so don't lose sleep over it.

33 Two Words with One Stone (Search Terms and Negatives)

Bad Search Terms (BSTs) tend to hunt in packs...

It's usually better not simply to hit the 'add as negative' button when you find one. These negatives would then only catch the specific phrase in question, which may rarely or never show up again in any case.

Instead, choose a negative to target the broadest (and shortest) element that makes the phrase irrelevant, catching similar BSTs in its net, but leaving all of your desired traffic intact.

For example, say you're advertising kitchens...

You see the search term: 'wooden kitchen set for kids'. Rather than turning that long-tail search phrase into a negative, set a wider net with the negative 'kids'... and throw in 'child', 'childs', 'children', 'childrens' while you're at it, to eliminate the whole playset / toy (let's add those too) theme.

> **The more rigorous way to identify harmful phrases within multiple search queries is with an N-Grams script... Look it up if you're not already using one.**

34 Broad Match Your Negatives

Broad match negatives don't expand on the (rather liberal) way that broad match 'positive' keywords do. (Google isn't nearly as keen to amplify your intended actions when it comes to *decreasing* your involvement in auctions…)

So broad match negatives are generally fine… and helpful in eliminating as much unwanted traffic as possible. Just shift to negative phrase or exact when word order matters. (Word order still matters to negative phrase, although it has long been abandoned by its positive cousin).

35 Broad Match… not often

Level 1

Broad match is *rarely* useful. The usual advice is to avoid it, as you've probably seen if you've read anything at all about Google Ads.

It's a loose cannon and will usually lead to your ads appearing against some quite ridiculous searches. In recent months, Google has been trying to make broad match more palatable, with the argument that its smart bidding algorithms will sift the good search terms from the bad…

There are some signs that it may be improving over time, and news that broad match keywords may even have unique access to certain data signals… but *avoid broad match* is still the usual advice from those not on Google's payroll… and it's a perfectly good policy (if not exactly an advanced tip), so if you turn the page now you'll be safe enough, but…

36 Broad Match… sometimes

Level 2

rarely isn't never, and broad match does have its place…

Broad match expansion can be used as a wide-net approach to find conversions among unexpected search terms… and to identify those converting search terms for use in new keywords.

Broad match can also be used in conjunction with tight limitations from other variables (location / demographic and particularly audience) to narrow down its field of play to a highly relevant set of users… making its wide-ranging search territory far less dangerous, and expanding into potentially converting traffic that you would otherwise miss.

(Of course, any broad match keywords should still be chaperoned by a hefty entourage of negatives.)

37 Search Terms and Common Sense

If search term 1 is converting acceptably well, while search term 2, which is only a hair's breadth away in terms of its meaning - hasn't converted despite a good number of clicks... let common sense intervene.

There's a lot of natural variation in conversion rate. If the search intent is clear - and proven to work for you in the form of other, similar search terms, then you can be forgiving of the instances that don't seem to be pulling their weight.

(This only works up to a point... After a certain threshold of volume, data really does trump common sense!)

38 When to Use SKAGs

Single keyword ad groups... Is there any more controversial topic in PPC?

SKAGs have been around as a concept since the early 2010s, rapidly gaining popularity until late in the decade, and then falling back out of favour with the introduction of close-variant matching in 2018-2019 (for exact and phrase match respectively).

While SKAGs still have their die-hard proponents, the phrase 'SKAGs are dead' now decorates PPC groups and forums liberally... (The closest thing we have to a native PPC meme!)

My advice on SKAGs:
Single keyword ad groups offer no advantage for those lower-tier keywords that don't pull any meaningful weight regardless of your structure... and minimal advantage for the mid-tier keywords where tightly-themed ad groups will work just as well, while holding the advantages of easier management, and not fragmenting your data...

For your top-tier keywords, which account for a disproportionate amount of spend and conversions, SKAGs come into their own.

Individual ad groups are a good way to isolate and fine tune those 'VIP' keywords... But they are not (and have never been) worthwhile as the structural framework for a whole account.

For a deeper look at the topic, read my blog post on SKAGs.

LANDING PAGES

39 **Quick Wins for Landing Page Experience**

Quality Score is a clunky system (see tip #32)

Among its flaws, it is nowhere near as responsive to improvements as it should be.

Yet Quality Score (or, to be more accurate, the underlying relevance calculations it represents…) does have a direct impact on the cost-effectiveness of your activity. So when quick wins are available, take them.

With Landing Page Experience, there are a few specific items that Google auto-scans for, whose presence definitely adds to your score. These are:

- ✓ contact information, or a link to a contact section
- ✓ a privacy policy
- ✓ a decent amount of original text

See more on what Google looks for in a landing page here on their landing page guide

40 **How Original?**

And when it comes to original content (see tip #39)… there are some handy free tools to ensure that your landing page text is unique.

My go-to content checker is copywritely.com/plagiarism/checker - but there are several that do a similar job.

If you've written the landing page text yourself, you should already know that you're on safe ground here, but if you've inherited one, you may be surprised how often duplicated text shows up…

41 Ready for Landing?

We often use existing 'inner pages' as our destination URLs. This is a reasonable way to increase ad relevance, but can cause a particular problem...

The common mistake is to send users to the most relevant inner page without carefully considering whether it stacks up as a landing page...

Often inner pages - with content specific to a particular sub-service or product - have been designed with a view to providing 'further information'. In the site's information architecture, the user is assumed to have *already passed through the home page*, become familiar with the seller, and now navigated on, having already decided on the relevance of the site.

These pages then lack the immediately persuasive text and imagery required of a landing page.

It's important to review any pages used as a final URL, for their potential impact as the *very first thing the user will see of the site*.

Does the page immediately clarify what the advertiser does, what they offer, and why they're a good choice? If not, choose another page, or fix it.

42 Test your Landing Pages

Running ongoing tests is a good habit to get into (and something that most PPCers don't do enough).

The more consistently you run landing page tests in search of improvements, the better you can expect your landing pages to perform.

There are several excellent tools for creating, testing and tweaking your landing pages

Which one is best for you depends on your tech stack and what kind of tests you are considering...

Google Optimize is free, it's simple to use, and it's excellent for evaluating small changes to your existing landing pages.

Unbounce is a great choice for creating and testing new variations.

43 Own Site or Standalone Landing Page?

It's a question every PPC professional faces...

When should you send users to a page on the primary website you're promoting, and when to use a separate - unconnected - landing page, without links to the main navigation and content....

Each option has its pros and cons.

Why would you send users to your own site?

✓ **Trust**

The user arriving at the main site can see that you are (probably) a well-established entity... and gets to find out more about your business and services before committing to an action.
This is particularly important when you're promoting a 'bigger-ticket' item, where more buyer deliberation is expected.

✓ **Secondary Promotion**

Once users have been exposed to your site - and know your URL - they are more likely to talk about it, link to it, bookmark it and return to it... feeding the main hub of your online presence. It's a minor factor in practice, but still a real one

✓ **Quicker / Simpler**

If a usable page already exists, it's far quicker and simpler to link to it than to create a new one on a new platform.
(And if you don't have a page on your site that's specific to your product or service and allows users to convert, then you should probably create one... regardless of PPC!)

What are the advantages of using a standalone landing page?

✓ **Focus**

With no distractions (navigation or other content) from the desired action you're promoting, you can increase the chances of users taking that action. This key benefit is the reason why many PPCers go for the standalone landing page approach by default.

✓ **Relevance**

You can design multiple landing pages to be ultra relevant to your ads and keywords, and expect a Landing Page Experience boost for that.
But be aware that you will need to include enough content and detail to satisfy Google's Landing Page Experience requirements.

✓ **Flexibility**

You'll have the freedom both to design the landing page as you want it - without the restrictions of the existing website's style or CMS - and to tweak and test changes more easily.

This flexibility is a particularly useful when advertising for a low-tech client, where having changes made (or even tracking tags inserted) can sometimes be a long process....

To sum up...

Standalone pages are a good idea if

- ✓ Your site is an eyesore
- ✓ You don't have and can't easily create appropriate specific pages on your main site
- ✓ You're running a straightforward lead gen campaign for that doesn't require major commitment or deliberation from the user

But if you have (or can create) decent landing pages on site, within your navigation - then this option usually has the edge. It also simplifies your marking operation.... and it doesn't hurt to keep things simple when you can.

Watch my [YouTube video](#) on this topic for more detail and examples

44 Improve Landing Pages with the Principles of Persuasion

While data should be at the heart of your messaging decisions, it's useful to add a dash of empathy and psychology to help you choose words that are likely to have the desired impact. In his seminal book, *Influence*, Robert Chialdini has a lot to say about what kinds of words these are.

In it, Chialdini sets out the six principles of persuasion...

1) **Reciprocity**

Simply, we're much more likely to do something for someone who has done something for us. Free samples, information-rich content and lead-magnets all make use of this principle to spark that small sense of indebtedness that can translate into sales.

2) **Commitment & Consistency**

Once we've agreed to a proposition, we'll go to some (oddly extreme) lengths to remain consistent with its implications. You'll see this at play in all types of sales copy (are you X? Then you need Y!). It also feeds into the idea that once a small step along the funnel has been taken, subsequent steps decrease in friction.

3) **Social Proof**

This is an idea well-known to marketers…. The tendency to see an action as appropriate when we see that others are already taking it.

As Chialdini points out, canned laughter is a prime example of this. It's annoying as hell… but it's there to provide social proof of how funny a show is. It doesn't have to 'fool' you consciously; its magic works at a deeper level.

For us marketers, star ratings, testimonials, awards, recommendations, 'likes', member or user numbers all draw on this psychological shortcut, and that's why we see them all over both ad text and landing pages.

4) **Liking**

We are more likely to do something for – or buy something from – someone we like, than someone we don't. No surprise there.

Among the many attributes and techniques that can influence likability, these two may be particularly useful:

- ✓ **Compliments.** We are absolute suckers for praise – even when it's quite plainly artificial. We seem to have an almost irresistible, automatically positive reaction to compliments (ever seen email text along the lines of "well done - you've done something amazing by signing up to this list. It shows you're an action taker" (yuck… but it works (even on a super-clever person like you!))
- ✓ **Familiarity.** The more you've seen a face – even if you don't remember having seen it – the more (in general) you like it. Have you noticed the same faces again and again with retargeted ads… you might not like the practice, but the faces are probably growing on you.

5) **Authority**

The power of authority to elicit compliance is dramatically demonstrated by the Milgram Experiment. If you're not familiar with it, it's well worth a read… it's a fascinating (and quite alarming) illustration of just how compliant people really are in the face of authority.

One source of authority is expertise. In ad or landing page text, a phrase like '10 years' experience' will help to establish some expertise, as would high-level, industry-related content.

6) **Scarcity**

As we associate higher price with higher quality, a similar automatic association arises with availability. Rare = Valuable. You will see the adjective 'rare' often used specifically to imply (and increase) desirability.

Ads and landing pages commonly use phrases like: 'limited-stock', 'limited-time offer' etc. 'Exclusive' / 'special edition' are also used to drive desirability. And they work.

Watch my YouTube video on this for some illustrations of the principles at work…

45 Congruence Analysis

This is an important piece of analysis, and one that's often neglected.

To carry out a congruence analysis, simply check whether the text in the ad matches the search term that triggers it, and whether the text on the landing page matches the text in the ad.

The match doesn't necessarily need to be word-for-word (though that's often a good bet) but should convey the same message, particularly any key benefits or offers.

In short, *whatever motivated the search should be reflected in the ad*, and whatever motivated the ad click should appear prominently on the landing page.

Make sure your messaging is congruent across your account, and UX, QS and conversion rate will all benefit.

46 Bounce Rate - Change the Rules...

We hear a lot about the limitations of Bounce Rate as a metric. It's true that not all bounces are equal - and with GA4 eliminating it as a metric, its relevance is likely to diminish.

But it's still a very useful indication of engagement levels across the different pages of your sites.

There is a simple step you can take to make it even more useful - and meaningful - especially when your bounce rates are generally high by virtue of how your site is structured.

Set a GA event to fire, a certain length of time after the user has hit your landing page.

This is very simple to do through GTM (there's a quick video tutorial on it in my course resources) - and makes bounce rate a more genuine measurement of engagement levels, and a more useful metric for guiding optimisation.

47 Ask the User (User Surveys)

The ISO defines usability as 'the extent to which a system, product or service can be used by specified users to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction in a specified context of use'.

- ✓ **Effectiveness:** can users fully do what they want to do?
- ✓ **Efficiency:** can they do it quickly and easily?
- ✓ **Satisfaction:** do they feel good about the experience?

With user testing tools, you will set a number of users (selected to represent the type of user whose experience you want to know about) a series of tasks to perform on your site.

You can be as specific as you like - so you can focus in on the landing page if you want to - and their attempts to do these tasks can be fully recorded along with their commentary on what they are trying to achieve, and how they are finding the process.

You can then analyse which tasks are harder / taking longer / more frustrating than expected...(falling down on effectiveness, efficiency or satisfaction) - and the beauty of this method is you will also see exactly how and why users are struggling with any components of the site.

This can be illuminating... and it's very underused as a method.

User Testing is much more within reach than most small agencies and freelancers realise. UserTesting is the original platform (and the only one that I have used personally - with great results). At time of writing they offer a 5-user test with full recordings for €245. There are several newer platforms that are a lot less expensive still.

48 **Lower-Commitment Conversions**

There are two good reasons to make 'low-commitment' conversions available to users.

1) For data

Conversion data is the currency of optimisation. When that currency supply runs low, you can apply a little 'quantitative easing' with a micro conversion…

This could simply be designating a step in the funnel, as a reasonable indicator of an interested session - or it could mean actually creating a new option of value for the user (e.g. sign up for the newsletter / download the guide)

2) To feed the funnel

When a B2B lead generation campaign struggles to convert directly to enquiry or booking, sometimes a lower-commitment option helps to turn bounces into upper-funnel entrants.

This 'Lead-magnet' type offer (a free guide or whitepaper) doesn't have to be used in place of the core, direct conversion CTA. It can be made available as a secondary, backup option.

This way the user isn't faced with an all-or-nothing proposition, and you can extract a lot of incremental value from those not ready to take the bigger step straight away.

PRINCIPLES

49 Free the Algorithm in One Realm... Restrain it in Another

Smart bidding has improved dramatically in the last few years. It certainly isn't the lumbering oaf it used to be. And yet...

For various reasons (the current limits of the technology and, perhaps, Google's intentional settings on how tolerant the algorithms are to risk and loss...) sometimes it needs to be kept in check.

So when you give the algorithm freedom in one dimension, you may need to restrain it elsewhere.

It is always wise to strike a balance between caution and control on one hand, and the ability to take advantage of Smart Bidding's potential on the other.

Here are five ways you can still exercise a bit of control when using one of the Maximise Strategies (with or without a target CPA/ROAS):

- ✓ Demographic segment exclusions
- ✓ Device category exclusions, (with -100% bid adjustments)
- ✓ Location targeting and exclusion (drill in to the matched location report to find under-performing areas
- ✓ Audiences (exclusions/targeting, and in the case of remarketing audiences - just adding them on observation adds new variables for the algorithms to work with)
- ✓ Targets (CPA or ROAS)... make them more ambitious when you're getting the traffic but it's not profitable / more lax when you're hitting target and want more volume (see tip #16)

and then there's always ad text, keyword selection and negatives...

50 Take Care with Major Changes

In complex systems, the relationship between inputs and outputs is far from predictable.

For that reason it pays to be humble about the limits of our predictive powers, and to be very cautious about making major changes when the going is good. This is especially true with Smart Bidding, which is a complex system in itself, interacting with the messy world of auctions and user behaviour (chaos magnified...).

So a series of tweaks is a safer option than a major overhaul. Even a well-reasoned one.

That said - after a certain point (and if sub-par performance gives you little to lose) sometimes it really is better to start over.

51 **"If You Chase Two Rabbits, You Will Lose Them Both"**

As PPC managers, we spend a lot of time thinking about how to make the best use of our budget... But as we dart between ways to optimise our use of ad spend, there's another resource we should really be considering...

It's a metric you don't see in your account, but overrides all others.

Your attention.

Just as we ruthlessly avoid spending budget in the wrong places... we should be just as intentional about where we spend our time, and our focus.

We shouldn't try to fix a problem just because it's there... Not before applying the 'will this move the needle?' test.

Ask yourself:

- ✓ Does this issue affect a high proportion of spend....
- ✓ Does it affect a high proportion of (current or immediately attainable) conversions?

But also ask:

- ✓ Does it have an acceptably-quick fix?
- ✓ Is there something more important for me to be doing with this account?

> *"Instead of asking how many tasks you can tackle given your working hours, ask how many you can ditch given what you must do to excel."*
>
> *Morten Hansen, 'Great Work'*

52 More Likely to Click vs More Likely to Convert

Here's the scenario: You're advertising one product: hair curlers (presented and packaged as being) for women.

To narrow your search campaigns' targeting to the right audience, would you exclude 'male' traffic?

It would be an intuitive move on the surface.

And yet…

If our other layers of qualification (tight keyword targeting / location etc) are already doing their job… it's likely to be counterproductive.

If men are searching on 'buy hair curlers', then those men are telling us that they are interested in buying a hair curler. At that point, the fact that they are men is no longer a disqualifying indicator.

This is not to say that there aren't some times when user-based targeting can further 'qualify the click'…

e.g. a click from an 18-24-year-old searching 'website design companies' might be disproportionately likely to come from a job-seeker rather than a potential client…

But unless you are aware of specific correlations like this (and provided you are targeting search terms that truly qualify the click) there is no need to get ahead of the data and aim for the avatar with audience and demographic targeting.

53 Make a Roadmap

What does a PPC plan look like?

One way to answer that question is with 'phasing'… Having a vision of how you want an account to evolve; crystallising the stages of evolution, and setting out the actions required to bring them about.

At the top level, your plan could be:

- ✓ First we'll aim activity at the low-hanging fruit (bottom of funnel traffic including brand and core terms) and establish a sustainable ROAS
- ✓ Then we'll expand cautiously into upper funnel keywords and targeted display
- ✓ Then we'll start remarketing campaigns
- ✓ Then we'll replicate successful activity on Bing Ads / add YouTube to the remarketing mix, etc…

Each of these components will be broken further into actions that can be laid out in sequence.

(by the way, you'll look a lot like you know what you're doing when you present this kind of sequence to a client or prospect - and a Gantt chart is an excellent way to do so. Feel free to use this one as a model http://bit.ly/ppcgantt)

54 **Done is Better than Perfect**

Knowing the tips and tricks is great (that's why you're reading this thing, right?) but if you really want to improve your Google Ads performance, it's action that counts...

But action can often be held up by perfectionism. So here are five practical ways you can benefit from the action-over-perfection mindset in Google Ads.

1) **Text Ads**

   Maintain three text ads per ad group.

   If you are not in a copywriting mood, or don't fancy your chances of improving on your current ads, it doesn't matter... Put in a new ad anyway.

   Testing beats not testing – and it's not unusual for thrown-together copy to outperform carefully-crafted versions.

2) **Audiences**

   Add them. You don't need to know ideal audiences or have data yet to determine them... Just add audiences on 'Observation' and you're on your way to a new layer of actionable data.

3) **Ad Extensions**

   Sitelinks, call-outs and structured snippets.

   If you are missing one of these sets of extensions, you are missing out.

   It would be really, really hard to do these extensions badly enough to perform worse than not having them... so add them quickly if you don't have the time or inclination to add them carefully... but add them!

4) **Conversion Tracking**

   The real world of conversion tracking is often a bit messy. There's frequently some reason why you can't track the whole story... so track part of it.

   As long as you track something correlated with value, you can use it to optimise... and that is gold dust. And if you can tweak your tracking - maybe add a micro conversion - to correlate your measurement a bit more closely with real-world value... do it.

5) **Attribution**

   There's a reason why you don't know which attributing model fits your users' buying pattern... It's because none of them do.

   There's no way of accurately measuring by % how much influence each 'touch point' has had on a person's decision to buy something. Not even close...

   But that doesn't mean that all attribution models are equal. Last Click (the default) is simple, but it's particularly short-sighted. Switch to position-based (or linear, or data-driven if it's available) and you'll at least get a fuller, more useful picture of the various contributions towards the end conversion.

`55` Step Away from the Data (walk in the Users' Shoes)

The first rule of PPC? Data is the currency of optimisation.

But ultimately, the whole range of Google Ads metrics providing that data - impressions, clicks, conversions... are all representations of people. People making decisions and taking actions.

Move the people; move the metrics.

Now, people are a varied bunch (as you'll be aware if you have clients...) but there are certain triggers that are known to move all of us towards action.

From Donald Miller's Building a Story Brand (punchline: Tell a story. Your customer is the hero - you are the guide who empowers them to avoid disaster and fulfill their desires.)

to Robert Chialdini's Influence (punchline: ...you'd better read the book... or watch my video on it.)

We all share certain hopes and fears that - when understood - point the way to messaging that's compelling, persuasive and effective.

So - every now and again - take a step away from the data and remember that an impression is an experience... a click is a decision... a conversion is a leap of faith...

In other words - see if you can empathise one notch more deeply with your target customer, and find the insights that data alone won't reveal.

56 Know your Audience

Consider the different ways you would go about explaining your product to people with different levels of awareness and interest in it.

Say you're selling a mobile phone. With any given campaign, are you targeting…

- a (rare breed of) user who doesn't know much about mobiles at all (think of the outdated lingo they might still be using… 'car phones'?)
- a typical adult, who knows plenty about phones (and spends 1/4 of their waking ours using one!) and wants to know how many megapixels the camera boasts; how many gigs of RAM it packs; how long the battery lasts…
- a bona-fide phone nerd, who pays attention to more esoteric features of the model, e.g. 'Smart HDR' or 'Dual Sim'. i.e. features that may be of little interest to the more casual phone user (or to you)…

But if we're promoting it, it's our job to find out what these deeper features are, and why they matter to our target customer.

Keep your audience in mind…. Their level of awareness; their stage in the buying cycle… and you'll be much better placed to present the information and benefits that can reach into their decision-making process, moving them along the buying journey.

57 Remember the Hard Reset Button

People often ask why I left Google.

There were two reasons… An exciting opportunity showed up (another story) but at the same time, as the company grew, it had less and less of what I used to love about it.

It's inevitable that as an organisation grows, its structures become more layered and fragmented, and as the left hand sees less of what the right hand is doing, it's harder to ensure that everything works together smoothly.

…and what else does that remind us of, but a Google Ads account ☺

As an account scales, it's harder to keep it coherent, and inefficiencies can grow exponentially.

Sometimes - at a certain point - rather than layering on yet more patches, the best thing to do is hit a 'hard reset'.

In PPC terms, that means a complete restructure.

When you do this, keep all your old campaigns on pause (especially if you're working for a client.)

Then you'll have the insurance of knowing that you can go back to the old setup if you don't manage to improve performance when you strike out into the unknown.

PROCESS
AND SETTINGS

`58` All Languages

When you're generating conversions at an acceptable rate, and looking for more of the same kind of traffic, try changing the language setting from the default 'English' (or whatever the default is in your case) to 'All languages'.

Your ads will now be shown to a new segment of otherwise untapped users. This is not as risky as it might sound...

Your keyword targeting still has the final say on whether users see your ads... As long as those keywords are properly chosen, you will still only be targeting the right users, searching in the relevant language.

This change just allows ads also to show to people whose first language might not be English (who have their Google account set to that other language and haven't been picked up by Google as English speakers...) or may be using someone else's device.

Switching to 'All Languages' expands your search volume by a few percent - depending on how cosmopolitan your targeted area is - so it just turns the dial a little further when you're looking to scale up.

`59` Turn off Auto Created Ads

Unless you specify otherwise, Google will automatically create new ads to run alongside your own efforts. These aren't always bad, but for all its growing ability, Artificial Intelligence doesn't yet write as well as you do... and the performance of these auto-generated ads tends to reflect this. Auto-generated ads also feel like a particularly intrusive piece of tinkering in your campaign, and you'll probably want to turn them off.

To do so, at the top level, hit 'settings' and the 'account settings' tab, then check 'Don't apply'.

60 Get to Know the Shortcuts

This is a quick one....And speed is exactly what you'll gain from getting familiar with the Google Ads interface shortcuts.

If there's one shortcut worth getting familiar with, it's 'G' then 'C', which jumps you back to the Campaigns view... (this one alone could save you precious minutes each day).

Other favourites:

- 'G' then 'J' - Ad Groups view
- 'G' then 'K' - Keywords view
- 'G' then 'A' - Ads and Extensions view

Hold 'SHIFT' and press 'A' to jump up to the 'whole account' level while staying on the same view (e.g. if you're looking at keywords within one ad group, this shortcut will then show you all ads.)

> **If want to get really nifty around the interface - take a look at the full list of shortcuts on Google's help page**

61 Deeplinking Bookmarks

For years I used Chrome bookmarks for GA, GAds, GTM etc... but each of them took me to the 'all accounts' page of the tool.

The amount of time I must have spent then navigating to / between different accounts is tragic to think of!

I now set bookmarks up for each specific account in each platform, like this 👇 . it's a great time saver.
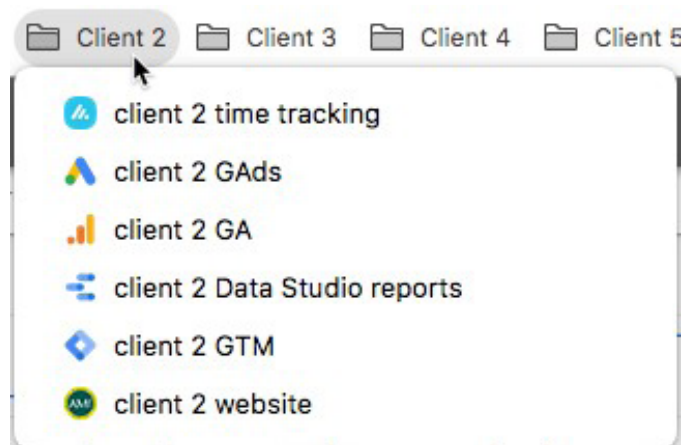
> **You can also set up separate Chrome 'Profiles' to open with a different set of default tabs for each client (or set of clients) for even slicker streamlining.**

🔢62 Turn off Dynamic Extensions

A little while ago I had a client ask why their ads said they were established in 1975 (they were established in 2003)!

The answer was Dynamic Callout Extensions.

Along the same lines as auto-generated ads, Google will also apply automatically-generated ad extensions… And the example above illustrates why these often aren't a good idea.

The option to disable these is now quite well hidden (it's also been known to move, and may have found yet another new hiding place by the time you read this…)

But look for it at the campaign level, by selecting ads and extensions > automated extensions > three dot menu icon > advanced settings…

🔢63 New Rules for Google Ads Editor

If you spend much time in Google Ads Editor, it's likely that you've become desensitised to those little yellow, triangular warning signs that follow so many of your changes…
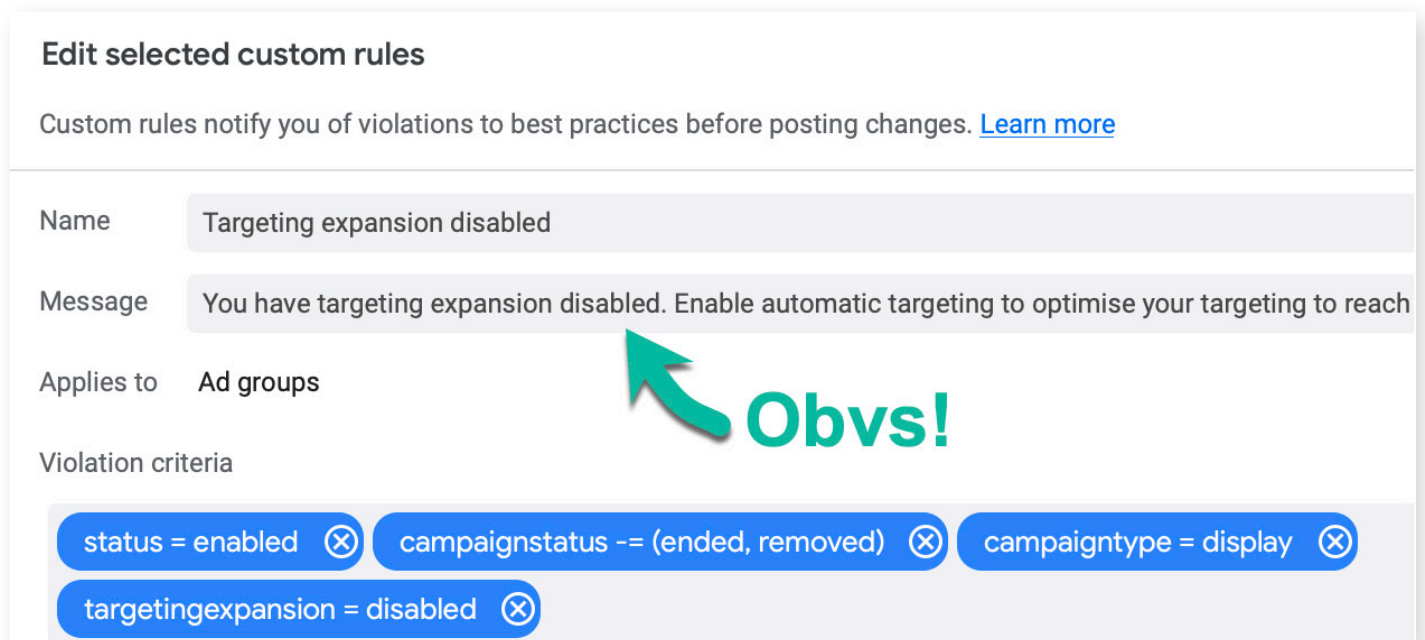
The rules that determine these alerts are flexible, so if you wish, rather than accept the continual nagging, you can decide for yourself whether any part of your setup deserves a yellow flag.

Under 'custom rules' you can find the list of current rules and the controls to edit, pause or remove them, and to set new ones.

A couple you will probably want to remove are 'Not Targeting Search Partners' and 'Manual Bidding'… (you really don't need a warning every time you opt for caution and control…).

As for new rules to consider… how about a simple URL checker, flagging any final URLs that don't match the root domain correctly

Or you could create one for brand keywords in non brand ad groups, (i.e. *keyword contains [brand term]* and *campaign name does not contain 'brand'*…)

Once the rules are meaningful for you (and not too overzealous) you might start paying attention to them again!

REPORTING AND ANALYSIS

64 The Added/Excluded Report

The Added/Excluded column shows whether each search term you're evaluating is an exact match for one of your keywords – and whether it's already excluded with a (exactly matching) negative. Important context for your work within the search term report.

But this variable can also be used for a nice piece of account-level analysis.

If you head over to the Google Ads Reports section, and create a table with Added/Excluded as your primary variable… add in impressions, clicks, cost, and conversions (we'll work with conversions rather than value here to keep it simpler).

In the report itself, the data is (unusefully) split by search term, and can't be aggregated by 'added' / 'excluded' status…
But we can fix that…

- Export the results into a csv, and upload it to Google Sheets
- Kill the first two rows, that appear above the column headers
- Create a pivot table (by selecting Data > Pivot Table > New Sheet)
- Choose Added/Excluded as the row, and your Google Ads metrics as the values, you'll see the data as aggregated across your account
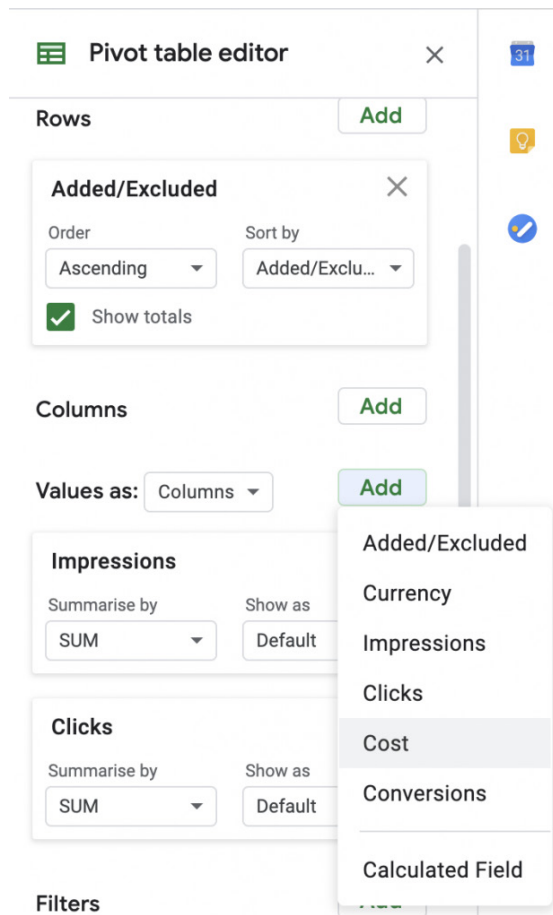
	A	B	C	D	E
	Added/Excluded	SUM of Impressions	SUM of Clicks	SUM of Cost	SUM of Conversions
1	Added/Excluded	SUM of Impressions	SUM of Clicks	SUM of Cost	SUM of Conversions
2	Added	69116	13474	877.85	1552.54
3	Added Excluded	0	0	0	0
4	Excluded	2769	137	29.87	3.57
5	None	227341	14466	2909.17	700.44
6	**Grand Total**	**299226**	**28077**	**3816.89**	**2256.55**

The key analysis here is the difference in impressions between 'added' (i.e. search term is an exact match for a keyword) and 'none', which implies some degree of search term 'expansion' from your specified keyword.

If you're using any match type other than exact, you're inviting this expansion, which is entirely valid, but remember that the further your search terms stray from your specified keywords, the less relevant – and precise – your keywords become as units of optimisation.

So in short, if 'none' accounts for more than around 80% – you might want to look at pruning your search terms more rigorously with negatives, and refining your match types. (There's plenty of room to quibble over the threshold for a healthy % here… but the higher it is, the less control you have over which specific search terms are triggering your ads, and what ads they're triggering.)

If you shift your gaze over to conversions and cost, you'll see how much of each is coming from these less 'controlled' impressions.

NB this data only covers your visible search terms, but that's more than enough for useful patterns to emerge in the data.

65 Avg Position Chart

It's been a while now since average position was laid to rest (the end of 2019... which is an aeon ago in PPC time). And yet, if you're deep enough into paid search to be reading this, you probably remember the simple pleasures of a single metric, showing where you appear among competing ads, on average, at auction.

For those who still hold a candle for average position, this table will be a blessing.

With credit to Marin software for the calculations, this table maps the visible impression share metrics onto the corresponding, best-estimate of average position.

Position	Recommended Metric	Impression Share
1	Impression Absolute Top %	100%
1.1		90%
1.2		82%
1.3		74%
1.4		66%
1.5	Impression Top %	76%
1.6		72%
1.7		69%
1.8		65%
1.9		62%
2		59%
2.5		46%
3		35%
3.5		26%
4		18%

Although the correlation between Impression Share and Average Position isn't super high, this table will at least help you calibrate roughly what a given IS value means in terms of the old average position metric.

66 Custom Columns for Profit

What's the gross profit from a campaign (or ad group… or keyword)?

It's a calculation you probably do in your head almost every time you look at your top-level performance data in Google Ads.

Simply spell it out with a custom column, using Conv. value – Cost.

Formula

+ METRIC	(	)	+	-	×	÷

Conv. value ⊗ - Cost ⊗

To use a segment in your formula, add a metric, and then choose a segment. You can use 1 segment type per formula.

Learn more

…Or go a step further and factor your profit margin into the custom metric, to go from gross to net profit. Just multiply conversion value by the margin (say, conversion value x 0.2, assuming a 20% margin) before subtracting cost.

Formula

+ METRIC	(	)	+	-	×	÷

(Conv. value ⊗ × 0.2) - Cost ⊗

67 Custom Column for Value Per Click

How about taking your profitable revenue, and dividing by clicks, for a really direct way of checking whether your CPCs are in a good place?

Formula

+ METRIC	(	)	+	-	×	÷

(Conv. value ⊗ × 0.2) ÷ Clicks ⊗

68 Impression Conversion Rate

This is probably my favourite custom column of all…

When judging your winning ads, you often face a trade-off between an ad with a higher CTR, and another with a better conversion rate.

Instead of weighing up those metrics against each other every time, here's a way to cut straight to a definite winner.

Create a custom column to factor both CTR and conversion rate into a single metric: 'impression conversion rate'. This will tell you the number of conversions each ad generated per 100 impressions – accounting for both CTR and conversion rate with a single score.

Formula

+ METRIC	(	)	+	-	×	÷

Conversions ⊗ ÷ Impr. ⊗

Number (123)
Percent (%)
Money (£)

CTR	Conversions	Conv. rate	Impression>Conv Rate
72.82%	365.72	4.06%	2.96%
56.36%	47.96	3.62%	2.04%
31.17%	13.99	2.80%	0.87%
63.25%	12.00	8.11%	5.13%

69 Track a 'non-conversion' Conversion

We often have tracking in place for interesting interactions that for some reason don't make the cut as 'conversions' in our standard reports.

Typically we select 'don't include in conversion column' and… forget about them (perhaps occasionally checking the 'all conversions' column).

But for an easily-visible view of conversion count from any particular goal that sits under 'all conversions', you can set up a custom column to show 'conversions' from just that goal.

After selecting 'conversions' as the base metric - use the segmentation options on the right, and choose the 'non-conversion-conversion' that you want to track.

Formula

+ METRIC	(	)	+	-	×	÷

Conversions: Click to Call (Spam Filtered) ⊗

Segment: Conversions

☐ Visit Contact (Spam Filte

☐ Contact Form (Spam Filt

☑ Click to Call (Spam Filter

☐ Click to Email (Spam Filt

70 Custom Column for ROAS
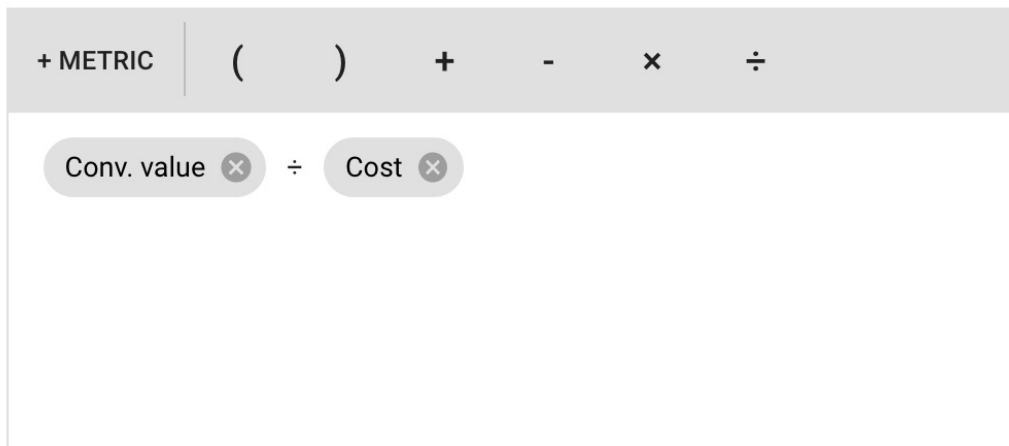
ROAS is not available as a standard metric in the interface. (Surprising, given the target-ROAS bidding strategy…)

We have something close, with the Conv. value/Cost metric, but this is:

a) given as a number rather than a percentage (ROAS is often stated as a number in the wild, but the mismatched format with your ROAS target is an unnecessary source of friction)

b) unclearly named, and likely to need some explanation if you're sharing it in a report with a client, for example.

To see a clear ROAS metric, just divide revenue by cost and format (if preferred) as a percentage.

Formula

Column format

To see ROI instead of ROAS, use the formula (Conv value – Cost) / Cost.

71 Confidence Thresholds 1 (be Flexible)

In Google Ads, we're continually evaluating keywords, ads, and other segments of traffic, and deciding to upweight, downweight or... just wait.

How much data do you need, before making sensible decisions?

It's a good question... and - as is the case for most good PPC questions - the answer is 'it depends'.

When you're happy with current performance levels, you'll want to set a high confidence bar before making changes.

The more badly - and quickly - you need an improvement, the more risk you can (and should) tolerate of making a wrong move in pursuit of improvement... and the lower your confidence threshold should be.

Along with bid levels and targeting, our confidence thresholds should be flexible, and contingent on current performance vs targets.

Depending on where you're standing, a leap in the dark could be a better option than standing still.

72 Confidence Thresholds 2 (Test Your Confidence)

While there's no hard and fast rule for calibrating the appropriate confidence level, there is a formula to tell you exactly how confident you (mathematically) should be about the superiority of one existing segment of traffic over another.

Let's say you're comparing ad A vs ad B for conversion rate. They only have, say, 200 and 250 clicks respectively. Ad A has 5 conversions, while ad B has 7.

	CLICKS	CONVERSIONS
AD A	200	5
AD B	250	7

You can see that ad B has a higher conversion rate so far, but how confident are you that it will prove to have a genuinely better conversion rate in the long run?

Test your intuitions by guessing how likely, as a percentage, ad B is to win ultimately on conversion rate, before you read on for the answer...

That's where the formula comes in...

There are several free tools for using it. The best I've found is at abtestcalculator.com.

If it's conversion rate that you're testing, put #clicks into the 'participants' field, #conversions into the second field, and see the results.

A/B Test Calculator

	Participants	Conversions	
Variation A	200	5	
Variation B	250	7	reset form

Copy Results URL

Executive Summary

Variation B's observed conversion rate (2.8%) was 12% higher than Variation A's conversion rate (2.5%).
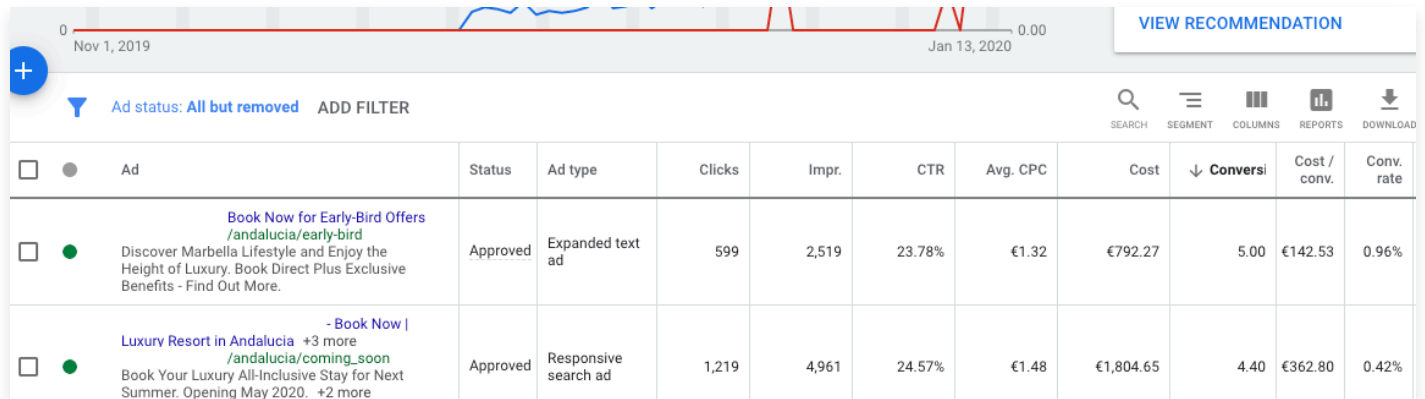There is only a 58% chance that Variation B has a higher conversion rate.

So in this case, *it's 58% likely* that ad B genuinely sees a better conversion rate in the long term. Good to know!

This probability output can give you a solid, well-founded confidence level to plug into your decisions...

Then you just need to be sensitive to the appropriate confidence thresholds for the situation in your account (see tip #71)...
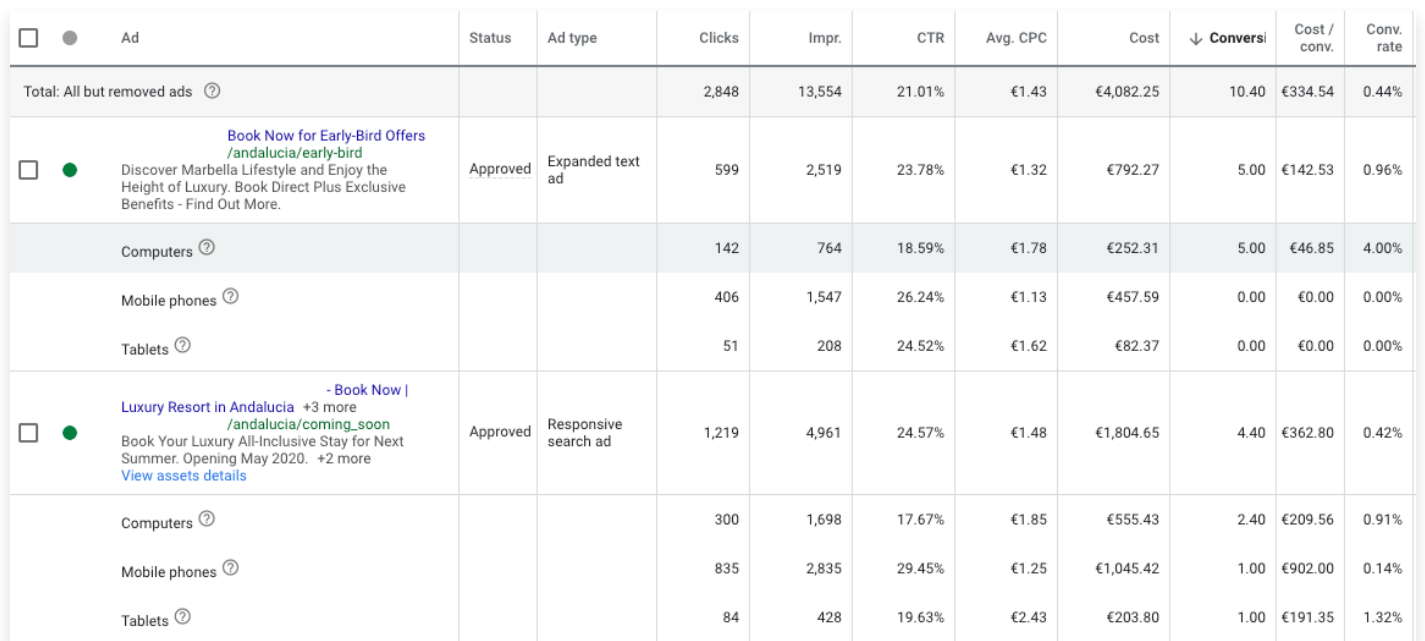
73 Segment for Higher-Resolution Analysis

Sometimes segmentation can fine tune your understanding of the data in Google Ads reports. Sometimes, it can completely transform it. Take this example, where we want to compare the performance of these two ads:

		Ad	Status	Ad type	Clicks	Impr.	CTR	Avg. CPC	Cost	↓ Conversi	Cost / conv.	Conv. rate
☐	●	Book Now for Early-Bird Offers /andalucia/early-bird Discover Marbella Lifestyle and Enjoy the Height of Luxury. Book Direct Plus Exclusive Benefits - Find Out More.	Approved	Expanded text ad	599	2,519	23.78%	€1.32	€792.27	5.00	€142.53	0.96%
☐	●	- Book Now | Luxury Resort in Andalucia +3 more /andalucia/coming_soon Book Your Luxury All-Inclusive Stay for Next Summer. Opening May 2020. +2 more	Approved	Responsive search ad	1,219	4,961	24.57%	€1.48	€1,804.65	4.40	€362.80	0.42%

On the face of it, the RSA is performing considerably worse (which RSAs often do on conversion rate...) But if we segment by device...

		Ad	Status	Ad type	Clicks	Impr.	CTR	Avg. CPC	Cost	↓ Conversi	Cost / conv.	Conv. rate
☐	●	Total: All but removed ads ⑦			2,848	13,554	21.01%	€1.43	€4,082.25	10.40	€334.54	0.44%
☐	●	Book Now for Early-Bird Offers /andalucia/early-bird Discover Marbella Lifestyle and Enjoy the Height of Luxury. Book Direct Plus Exclusive Benefits - Find Out More.	Approved	Expanded text ad	599	2,519	23.78%	€1.32	€792.27	5.00	€142.53	0.96%
		Computers ⑦			142	764	18.59%	€1.78	€252.31	5.00	€46.85	4.00%
		Mobile phones ⑦			406	1,547	26.24%	€1.13	€457.59	0.00	€0.00	0.00%
		Tablets ⑦			51	208	24.52%	€1.62	€82.37	0.00	€0.00	0.00%
☐	●	- Book Now | Luxury Resort in Andalucia +3 more /andalucia/coming_soon Book Your Luxury All-Inclusive Stay for Next Summer. Opening May 2020. +2 more View assets details	Approved	Responsive search ad	1,219	4,961	24.57%	€1.48	€1,804.65	4.40	€362.80	0.42%
		Computers ⑦			300	1,698	17.67%	€1.85	€555.43	2.40	€209.56	0.91%
		Mobile phones ⑦			835	2,835	29.45%	€1.25	€1,045.42	1.00	€902.00	0.14%
		Tablets ⑦			84	428	19.63%	€2.43	€203.80	1.00	€191.35	1.32%

We can see that the relevant variable here isn't the ad, it's the device... BOTH ads are performing terribly on mobile (in terms of direct conversion rate and CPA)... and both are doing acceptably well on other devices... The bulk of the difference in performance shown between the two ads, is due to the greater proportion of mobile traffic going through the RSA.

This is a significant finding that could spare the RSA from being paused based on misleading data... and there would be no way to reach this conclusion from either the unsegmented ads report or the devices report alone.

This kind of finer-grained analysis is one of the built-in advantages that smart bidding should have over manual. But there are still plenty of reasons and instances for using manual bidding... and when you are bidding manually, deep segmentation really comes into its own.

74 Lead Scores as Goal Values

When your conversion is an enquiry, it's often a good idea to assign a roughly-estimated conversion value, based on the expected value of a lead.

If you can segment those enquiries in the process of signup then you can go a few steps further, and assign differentiated values based on 'lead score'. This may simply be based on the selection in a dropdown on the enquiry form, or it may be more complex, taking other interactions into account (or even offline conversions reimported, based on actual lead progress...)

Either way, conversion values are a useful signal for optimisation - even when heavily estimated... and better-differentiated values are all the more useful.

Note that for value differences based on audience, device or location, you can now use Conversion Value Rules to adjust values dynamically.

75 Optimising on Engagement Metrics

It doesn't come close to having proper conversion data... But when you don't have any - or enough - conversion data to guide your decisions, supplement it with bounce rate, time on site and/or pages per session. You can import these metrics and see them at the keyword/ad level, by linking your Google Ads and Google Analytics accounts, and opting to 'import site metrics' (the method will be different for GA4).

76 Engagement Metrics for Location and Device

While GA engagement metrics can be imported and seen against keywords and ads, they aren't available in the Google Ads interface for other variables, like devices and locations.

Luckily, these insights are available in Google Analytics... instructions below for Universal Analytics (GA4 is still finding its feet with this kind of thing at time of writing).

For devices, the simplest way is to go through the **Google Ads** report in GA and - under **Campaigns** - add 'device category' as a secondary dimension. If you then sort by campaign, you can easily see the breakdown of engagement metrics for each campaign, for each device category.

You can do a similar thing with 'day of week' - though in this case to make the report more readable, you may want to apply a filter to see one campaign at a time...

With locations, you'll need to go the other way round. Navigate to **Audience > Geo > Location**, add the campaign as a secondary dimension, apply a filter to see only the campaign of interest, and voila! Engagement metrics for that campaign, broken down by user location.

77 Don't Forget Upper-Funnel Contributions…

Before you cut out a chunk of activity based on low performance, take a moment to ask whether it may be making a less visible contribution to your success, further up the funnel.

Assisted conversions in GA are one good way to check this…

You can also get a window into upper-funnel contributions within Google Ads, with the Attribution tool.

This is particularly useful for mobile traffic, which is at high risk of rash judgements based on immediate ROAS or CPA alone. Mobile traffic often plays a disproportionately valuable part in the upper funnel (initial research on the phone during a commute… more detailed research and purchase later on a desktop. You'll probably recognise that pattern.)

To check this, navigate to **Tools > Attribution > Assisted Conversions > Dimension: Devices** - and this (very GA-style) report tells you how many assisted conversion came from each device…

Device	↓ **Last click conversions**	Last click conversion value	Click and view assists	Click and view assist value	Assists/last click conversions
Desktop	52	320	5	25	0.1
Mobile	15	120	4	65	0.27

You can expect to see a much higher proportion of assisted conversion from mobile than other devices, and the number on the right shows you that proportion… so if this number is a large proportion of 1 (perhaps over 0.25, as a rule of thumb) then there's real value in those assisted conversions.

Take it into account before wielding the axe.

78 Estimated Values for Conversions

Some metrics are better than others for guiding you to a profitable outcome…. There's a nice quote on this along the lines of 'you get what you measure'… (the origin and the exact original version seem to be hotly disputed so let's just call it a general axiom that seems to have some truth to it.) With that in mind, it makes sense to measure something as close to your ultimate success as possible…

A good example is conversion value… a much more precise measurement than #conversions. To access conversion value, it is worth assigning values to your goals, even when those values are estimated.

With lead generation accounts - where the tracking often stops at 'enquiry', consider applying an estimated value to your lead conversions (especially if there's any way to differentiate different leads or types of lead - see tip #74)

e.g. you might be tracking these different routes to (potential) enquiry

- Click to call
- Click to email
- Contact form submission

Set different values for each type of enquiry, based on whatever information you can gather from your client, mixed with your experience and assumptions about the value of each one (e.g. 5, 10, 40 respectively).

You will still have conversions, and CPA, but you'll now have an extra layer of more nuanced data to steer by.

This is especially valuable with smart bidding, where the algorithm is fairly blind to context, but will seek out whatever you ask it to… If you differentiate value per goal in a way that's even slightly better than a completely flat value across all conversions, then you are better aligning the algorithm's aims with your own.

79 Auction Insights over Time

One of the more recent additions to the 'presets' in the reporting section, is one called auction insights.

You will know Auction Insights in its original form - the competitor analysis tool directly linked from the left hand navigation. This report has great explanatory power when you're investigating a sharp rise in CPCs...

However, it lacks some basic and important functionality.

When we open Auction Insights, we usually want to know whether/how competition levels have changed. Yet the standard report is conspicuously lacking in any way to show changes over time.

It has no a time series chart, and - unlike most standard reports, it doesn't even allow a date range comparison, to show changes within the table.

These functionality gaps were all addressed in November 2020, with 'Auction Insights v2' ... which is only available in the reporting tab.

Here you can make a time series showing how your competitors have shifted in all the usual Auction Insights metrics - making for a much clearer picture of the changing competitive landscape.
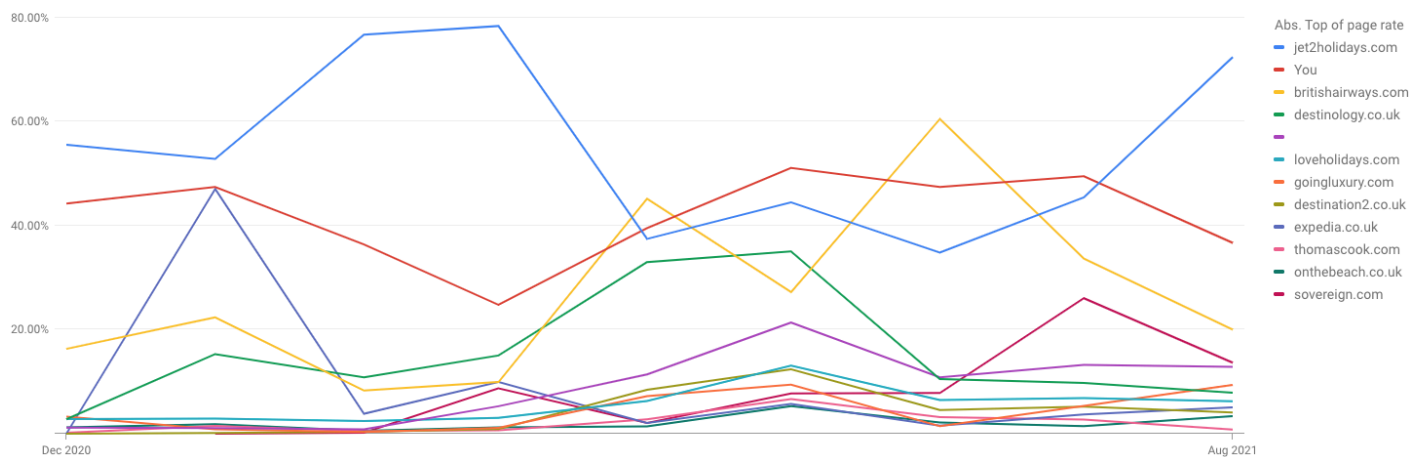
80 Don't Judge Too Early

Your clients may need to hear this more than you do... but taking an early reading too seriously is a common analysis mistake in PPC.

I have had clients (I'm sure I'm not alone...) who typically received, say, 4-5 leads per day, and would stress out if they hadn't yet seen any come through by noon on any given day (and a Sunday at that... ☺)

Trend lines in PPC performance contain plenty of natural variation within them.
Zoom out to an appropriate level before making judgements.

81 Confidence Thresholds 3 (Rule of Three)

While it's common to judge too early (*whispers to audience*: particularly for clients) - it's not always obvious how much data you need before making a judgement... Nor does that question always have the same answer, (see tip #71)

But there is a reasonable rule of thumb.

Once spend reaches three times the average or expected CPA on any given dimension-value (i.e any particular keyword, ad or segment of traffic you're judging) - that's about the minimum needed to start making a judgement on it. It will be a weak judgement at that point to be sure... but 3x the expected average is in the right ballpark for a reasonable minimum.

To give an example, let's say we want to judge the set of keywords below. Take the target CPA of £5. After £15 spent without any conversions, we can start taking the reading seriously. (It doesn't mean the keyword has no hope... there are plenty of other strings to pull besides pausing the keyword... but we can *start* to think that we might need to pull one of those strings at this point.

	TARGET CPA	SPEND	CONV	INTERESTING?
PIZZA DELIVERY	£5	£5	0	✗
PIZZA NEAR ME	£5	£10	0	✗
ORDER PIZZA	£5	£15	0	✓

Similarly, if you're judging conversion rate, then however many clicks you expect each conversion to take... Three times that number of clicks is enough to start making judgements (unless a high number of conversions have come to the rescue, making an early judgement possible).

82 The Trouble with Search Partners (Data Dilution)

Google Ads Search Partners is one of those 'default opt-ins' that can really cram your budget with lower-quality traffic.

I generally recommend turning Search Partners off.

If you do run it (occasionally it does add value – especially in retail...) it's wise to keep a close eye on it while you test.

But the low-value traffic is easily avoided. The real problem with Search Partners is harder to spot...

With Search Partners traffic contributing to your data, you can easily find yourself acting on misleading results...

Keyword	Impr.	↓ Clicks	CTR	Avg. cost	Cost	Search lost IS (rank)
+kids +trainers	714	8	1.12%	€0.31	€2.48	8.31%
Google search	51	7	13.73%	€0.32	€2.21	45.54%
Search partners	663	1	0.15%	€0.27	€0.27	2.89%

See how the Search Partners segment seriously down-weights CTR, and obscures the Lost Impression Share against this keyword in Google Search results, when you simply look at the un-segmented data, shown in the top row.

The aggregated CTR for this keyword of 1.12% bears little relation to the excellent CTR it is actually achieving on Google search (~14%) or the extremely-poor CTR on Search Partners (0.15%).

Conversely, as the impression Share on Search Partners is nearly maxed out, the huge impression share loss to rank, for that more-important Google Search traffic, is hidden.

Although it isn't contributing much in terms of clicks, by its flood of impressions, Search Partners data is obscuring both the major success (CTR) and missed opportunity (Lost Impression share) that would otherwise be clear.

Watch out for this effect when you run Search Partners, and remember to segment by network to check for it.

83 Automated Rules for Base Optimisation

Automated rules are often handy for time-sensitive bulk-changes (e.g. pausing and activating ads for the start and end of a sale)

But they're also a powerful time-saver for large accounts using manual bidding, offering a base level of optimisation to ensure that the clearest cases calling for bid changes, get dealt with.

Most important is the rule you'll set up to reduce bids on low-performing keywords.

Lower bids on keywords with cost>X and conversions <Y over a certain period (whatever minimum number makes sense for you to isolate your lower converters).

NB if you used a 'maximum cost/conv' threshold alone, wouldn't catch those keywords with no conversions at all...

There are three or four basic automated rules that will cover the bases... but this one sits at the top of the list.

84 Streamline your Reporting

How much painfully-dull time has been spent compiling PPC reports that no-one will ever read? Given the shortness of life, the answer is: too much.

Reporting should not (usually) just be a regurgitation of stats... but whatever metrics you do report should absolutely be templated to update without your manual input. It's almost always spending the worth extra time once, to prevent a tedious time suck each month.

Don't put more information into a report than its recipients need. Resist the temptation to add detail for the sake of appearing thorough... it greatly reduces the prospect of the report actually being given due attention.
But (with the stats taken care of) do include context, meaning, and actionable conclusions in your text updates.

Data Studio is the ideal basis for this mix.

85 Optimisation Score 1

Optimisation score has a bad reputation.

…and so it should.

Far too many of the recommendations push 'quantity over quality', and carelessly recommend loosening up your targeting with e.g. broad match and irrelevent keywords… smart bidding when you don't have the conversion data to use it carefully…. adding DSAs or smart display when there's no good reason to think that they will be a prudent use of your resources.

So treat Optimisation Score with the ambivalence it deserves… but, don't dismiss it altogether.

There are useful recommendations and reminders hiding in the rough.

And as a Google rep very fairly pointed ot to me (when I resisted the usual push to apply recommendations and raise optimisation score…) the recommendations under *Ads and Extensions* ones generally are a lot more sensible than those under *Bids and Budgets*, which tend to be the worst offenders.

86 Optimisation Score 2

So if you're willing to wade through the rough to find those diamonds, this is an efficient way to do it.

1) Forget the 'cards' view… switch to 'table' (top right)… where you can see a summary by campaign.
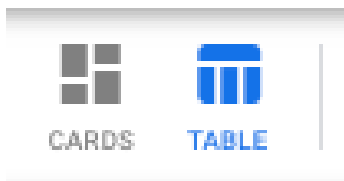
Remember that some types of recommendation are better than others. Some of them (e.g. 'try this keyword on broad match') are rubbish in general; others are unlikely to be relevant to you and your account specifically…. but there are valuable insights to find in there if you're willing to look.

2) So take one of the more sensible recommendation categories, sort by score uplift, to see campaigns in which the recommendation is being pushed most strongly…

Campaign	Prev. weekly spend	Optimization score	Create Dynamic Search Ads	Add audiences for reporting	Bid more efficiently with Target CPA	Remove conflicting negative keywords	Raise your budgets for upcoming traffic increases	Add assets to your responsive search ads
Total: Account	£11,024.77	64.3%	+1.7%	+1.6%	+1.4%	+0.8%	+0.8%	+0.5%
Shopping_Brand_PLA_GGL	£3,628.88	60.8%	–	+2.7%	–	–	–	–
Shopping_Generic_PLA_GC	£1,373.07	60.8%	–	+2.7%	–	–	–	–
Brand_Core_PS_GGL_SEA_	£1,685.34	70.3%	+4.3%	+1%	–	+3%	–	+0.9%
Brand_Categories_PS_GGL	£858.27	56.3%	+4.2%	+1%	–	–	–	+0.6%
Brand_Core_Exact_BS_GGL	£1,335.61	74.5%	–	+1%	+11.5%	–	–	+1.9%
Brand_Product_PS_GGL_SI	£420.28	65.5%	+4.3%	+1%	–	–	–	+0.9%
RLSA_Brand_Core_PS_GGL	£1,124.82	65.8%	+4.3%	–	–	+3%	+7.4%	+0.2%
RLSA_Brand_Categories_P:	£422.85	52.1%	+4.3%	–	–	–	–	+0.8%
RLSA_Brand_Core_Exact_B	£134.34	87.1%	–	–	–	–	–	+1.8%

This is a good way to extract what value there is hiding among the less useful entries

87 Campaign-Specific Conversions

Campaign-specific conversions are an easily-forgotten feature… but good use cases are easy to spot if you keep the option in mind.

For example, with Smart Bidding, campaign-specific conversions allow you to allocate a dedicated budget for driving a particular conversion.

When a campaign may be generating multiple conversions - all worth tracking in their own right - but you want a certain strand of activity to optimise single-mindedly for one particular outcome… specifying a conversion (under **Settings > Additional Setttings > Conversions**) gives a campaign tunnel vision for that single goal.

🟩88 Watch your Dates!

Many a mistake in analysis is made through carelessness with dates.

The most common is simply inferring too much meaning from too short a date range.... mistaking minor peaks and troughs for genuine trends.

But here's another - more interesting one...

Weekends often see very different behaviour from weekdays - not least in our field of paid search. When comparing two date ranges (even month-long ranges) the differing proportion of weekend days can give the misleading appearance of a genuine rise or decline. Also take care not to overinterpret a spike/dip if your date range ends on a weekend... see this tweet from Dan Barker (@danbarker), in which he calls out exactly this mistake in a very different context:

dan barker ✔ @danbarker · May 1, 2020   ...

I worry that people just believe things like this without looking at the data. Rory says visits to workplaces are rising.

But if you look at data: it's basically flat – there are spikes on weekends, and the data happens to finish on a weekend.

Rory Cellan-Jones @ruskin147 · May 1, 2020

gstatic.com/covid19/mobili... latest Google mobility data shows quite an uptick in UK activity- eg park visits now only 10% below normal compared to around 50% at start of lockdown. Visits to workplaces also rising

89 When High CVR is a Bad Sign

Conversion rate, cost per conversion and - if you have it - return on ad spend...

These are all metrics that do a decent job of telling you how well your PPC activity is performing. All reliable indicators of the health of your campaigns.

Except when they're not...

There are times when a higher conversion rate not only stops being a worthy KPI but, conversely, starts pointing towards wasted spend...

These cases are important to spot, and to act on.

Take this example, from a commercial cleaning company client...

Along with high-quality leads, the client was seeing quite a few enquiries from prospective cleaners.

There's a certain amount of user filtering we can do with keyword selection, negatives, ad messaging clarity etc... but some traffic from the 'wrong' kinds of user will always slip through.

By paying attention to the data over time, we learnt that a much higher proportion of the irrelevant enquiries are coming from mobile than desktop... so the higher conversion rate we saw on mobile, was not the usual indicator of success.

There are certain recurring patterns here. e.g. B2B campaigns often see lower-quality leads - with a higher proportion of employment seekers - among the 18-24 band, so this could be a good first place to look for 'dud conversions' in your campaigns.

Ideally what you count as a conversion really is the desired outcome... but with lead gen campaigns that's not always the case.

So be prepared to rethink the meaning of conversions, conversion rates, and CPAs when you can pinpoint segments of traffic that tend towards driving those 'conversions' that you don't want.

And keep Conversion Value Rules in mind for cases like the one above, where conversions from a particular device category warrant a different value weighting.

90 Let the Analysis Fit the Volume

When you don't have many data points, you have to accept that you're working with a broad brush if you want to make meaningful patterns.

That means being selective about the variables you use for analysing performance, and sticking to those dimensions that don't offer too many different values.

For example, Device Category is ideal for low data volumes because it's split into just three values (mobile, desktop and tablet).

Between these three, more often than not, you'll see a meaningful pattern worth acting on.

Another place where you can use this principle is in granularity of the audiences you apply.

If your campaigns aren't teeming with data, don't use remarketing audiences split into: 15-day site visitors / 30- day / 60-day / 2 x product page viewers / cart abandoners etc.

Limit it to fewer, more coarse-grained groups. e.g. 'all users' as step one / then add 'product viewers'... 'cart abandoners' and so on when your data stretches to it.

I usually add In-Market audiences on 'Observation' to my campaigns, as they often reveal some useful, unintuitive patterns.

But – if you add them all – and you're running a £1000/month campaign with CPCs around £2-£3... well, you get the picture (i.e. you won't get the picture).

Instead, add fewer, broader categories.

e.g. rather than adding 'Banking Services', 'Credit & Lending' etc, just try the broader umbrella audience, 'Financial Services'.

91 Diagnosing a Decline

Most of the tips in this book are designed to help you optimise better.

…and that's great when your campaigns are running smoothly… but sometimes things can really tank.

Conversions are down; clients are relying on you (vocally), and you don't know why the same setup that was working before has suddenly taken a massive dive!

'Optimisation' isn't quite the right word for what you need at that point ('gin' is more like it…)

If you've worked with PPC for a while, then you've been in some version of this situation. Knowing how to get back out of it is crucial to a long and happy PPC life!

So here's a useful guide to the basic steps of diagnosing a decline in your search campaigns. Keep it handy.
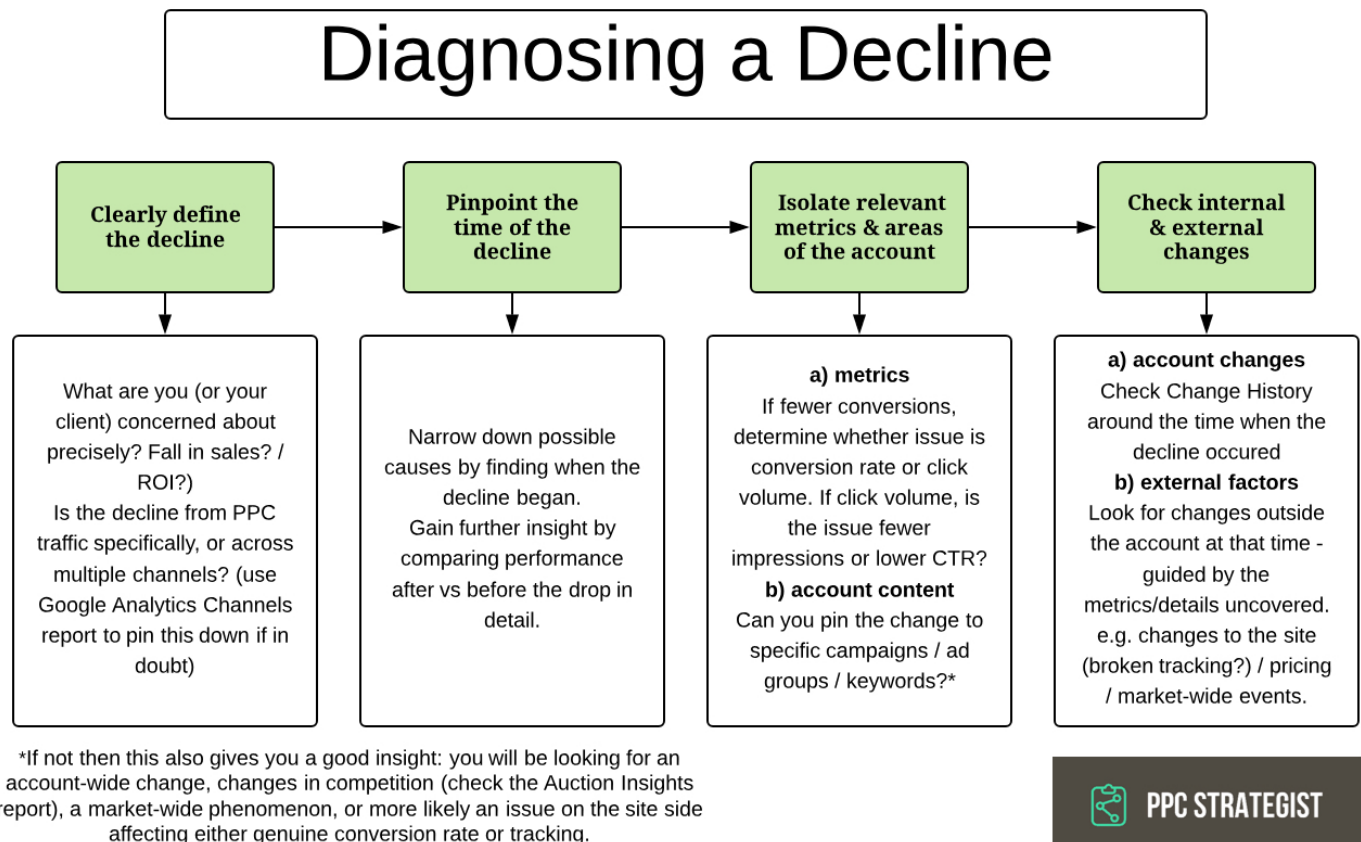
Also remember the Explanations feature, which can cut to the cause of metric changes that show up in a date range comparison.

92 How to Set a Budget (the Simple Way)

How much should we spend…?

There's more than one way to approach this question (and it can be a deceptively difficult one to answer…)

But this is one, simple approach.

View the first stages of an account's life as a trial.

Estimate how many clicks you think it will take to establish a 'baseline performance'… That is, to get through the initial, intensive trial and error, and settle on a performance level that will be something like a true reflection of where the account should be in the medium term (hopefully you expect that to be a profitable level, or you should seriously consider whether it's a good idea to take the account on at all).

Estmate average CPCs (keyword planner is pretty good for this) and multiply the 'clicks required' by that average CPC.

(As you'll already be thinking, CPCs may vary considerably, both between keywords and over time… So 'estimate' is definitely the operative word here… but remember we're looking for a simple starting point.)

That's the total 'trial budget'.

Split that budget into either two or three, depending on whether a two or three month trial makes more sense…

There are other approaches to setting a starting budget (I go through six of them in the budgeting unit in my course) but this one is a reasonable way to start triangulating on a figure that makes sense.

93 Micro Conversions

When conversions are thin on the ground, engagements metrics (bounce rate, time on site etc) are a useful secondary measurement of traffic quality…

But when you can, rather than rely on these weak indicators, it's useful to set a lower-value conversion as a signal of value to help guide your optimisation efforts.

As a general rule… when you either can't track the user action you really want - or doing so doesn't give you enough information to work with - move one stage further back in the funnel and track that.
This way you can at least differentiate users who have made progress towards your ultimate goal from those who haven't. Then you can identify and replicate the former group more than the latter…. i.e. you can do some genuine optimisation!

BEYOND
GOOGLE ADS

94   Some Things are Worth Outsourcing

How dirty to get your own hands is an important debate… and it relates to the level of trust we put into the smart bidding algorithms.

But some aspects of account management can be outsourced more safely than others.

Basic checks on the intended setup and expected operation of your account are one task (or rather, several tasks…) that it's worth removing from your plate and entrusting to a specialist tool.

There are several tools capable of doing a good job of this, ensuring that nothing simple slips through the net. Adalysis and Opteo are two tried and tested options, valuable to have in your toolkit if you're managing several accounts.

95   The Deeper Determinants of Performance…

The scope of this book extends to PPC, and how to do it better. No farther…

But the bigger picture of how you use your time, attention and faculties, feeds right back into your Google Ads performance in a way that would be foolish to ignore.

Rather than step into the self-improvement guru shoes myself (they don't fit), I'll list a few books from which I've personally gained a huge amount in this regard.

- ✓ **Atomic Habits (James Clear)**

  For genuinely actionable and effective concepts, this book is among the best I've ever read. It shows you how to make real changes in your behaviour, for real results, and how to get intentional about deciding what those changes should be.

- ✓ **The Miracle Morning (Hal Elrod)**

  A title that screams overpromise belies a little gem of a book. One that I credit with a genuine (positive) change in trajectory in my own life. It sets out a fairly strict regime for establishing the best possible conditions for your success. Thankfully, cherrypicking the parts that suit you will work just fine.

- ✓ **Getting Things Done (David Allen)**

  The most practical of the three books. GTD guides you through a surprisingly manageable process of creating order from the chaos of your myriad to-dos, in all areas of your life. I'd be surprised if this book doesn't increase the clarity with which you approach the (rather important) question of how to spend your time.

96 Complementary Skills

Whether you use paid search for your own business, as a freelancer or an agency professional, it sits within a wider context: the project of maintaining and growing a business online.

The role Google Ads plays in that project can always be better understood, and enhanced, with reference to some of the other cast members...

- ✓ Statistics
- ✓ Coding
- ✓ Design
- ✓ Copywriting

These are some of the skills at the top of the list, and mastering one of them can give you a rare edge among fellow marketing professionals.

To determine your current level and identify potential gaps, check out Target Internet's Digital Marketing Skills benchmark test.

More than just plugging gaps, picking an area to go deeply into can provide a serious step change in your marketing powers.

97 Keep Microsoft Ads up Your Sleeve

And - closer to home - one particular platform you should definitely be well aquainted with is Microsoft Ads (formerly Bing Ads)

This is a very easy win when you want more of the same kind of traffic.

Microsoft has always been content to take a lead from Google with their ad platform, so as well as looking and behaving in a way very familiar to any Google advertiser, Microsoft also makes it simple to transfer your GAds setup over.

You can even set it up to pull in any changes you make to your equivalent campaigns on Google Ads, weekly or daily - with a flexible set of options for tweaking them on arrival into MS Ads.

This allows Microsoft Ads to act effectively as an extension of your search volume on Google Ads... Always a good option to remember, and to offer as an upsell when your client wants more volume.

98 Synergise with Facebook Ads

If you're running Facebook Ads as well as Google Ads, look at how you can turn the two channels into more than the sum of their parts.

The most obvious ways lie in the use of audiences and insights gained on one channel, to enhance your targeting - and results - in the other...

For example, users brought in through search, clearly come with a big fat label indicating intent (an attribute that is much less transparent with Facebook Ads). They can then be turned into audiences and shown specifically relevant messaging on Facebook Ads.

While Google Ads can provide you with this powerful intent signal, Facebook audiences are split into more - and finer grained - sub-categories of user attributes and interests. Understanding which Facebook audiences your vistors came from can provide an extra layer by which to categorise your Google Analytics or Google Ads audiences.

Where you have sufficient traffic volume, remember to look for opportunities like these to enhance your use of both channels.

99 Optimise the Optimiser

You can give yourself constant upgrades through learning. (A good thing to do..)

But what about your energy / decision-making skills / motivation / dilligence?

Don't forget that a lot of what really moves the needle is nothing to do with what strategy you choose or how often you check what report... it's about you being on top of your game.

Sleep, exercise, diet, and the mental framework you create for yourself... Pick one of of those, take some intentional action to improve it, and (though this 'paid search tip' might sound a little off-piste) there's a good chance that that action will be the single most influential one suggested in this ebook.

100 Stock with Clients (Political Capital)

It's a hidden metric...

It can be increased with compliance, approachability, proactive communication, honesty, good results.

It can be traded for: time off, and tolerance of risk taking or dips in performance.

It can result in: not being hassled or over-questioned, and a longer account life-expectancy.

Try estimating your stock with each client as a mark out of ten, and use the results as a factor in determining how to spend that other hidden metric: your time.

Free Resources

- Want to go deeper into the topics explored in these 100 tips?

  You can do just that in my free Facebook group:

  The PPC Lounge

- Stay up to date with Google Ads news and (even more) tips, on o my Youtube channel:

  PPC Strategist YouTube

- If you want to go back to basics, try my free beginners' mini course:

  Paid Search Fundamentals

Take it to the Next Level

For those who seriously want to improve their PPC skills, performance and career, I have something else to offer.

Become a Google Ads Level Up member to gain access to my ongoing support and...

- A high-level paid search video course (over 45 units with ongoing updates...)
- Exclusive resources (cheatsheets, guides, walkthroughs, how-to vids)
- Members-only Facebook group
- Fortnightly live Q&A sessions
- Discount on 1-2-1 sessions with me

Join Google Ads Level Up
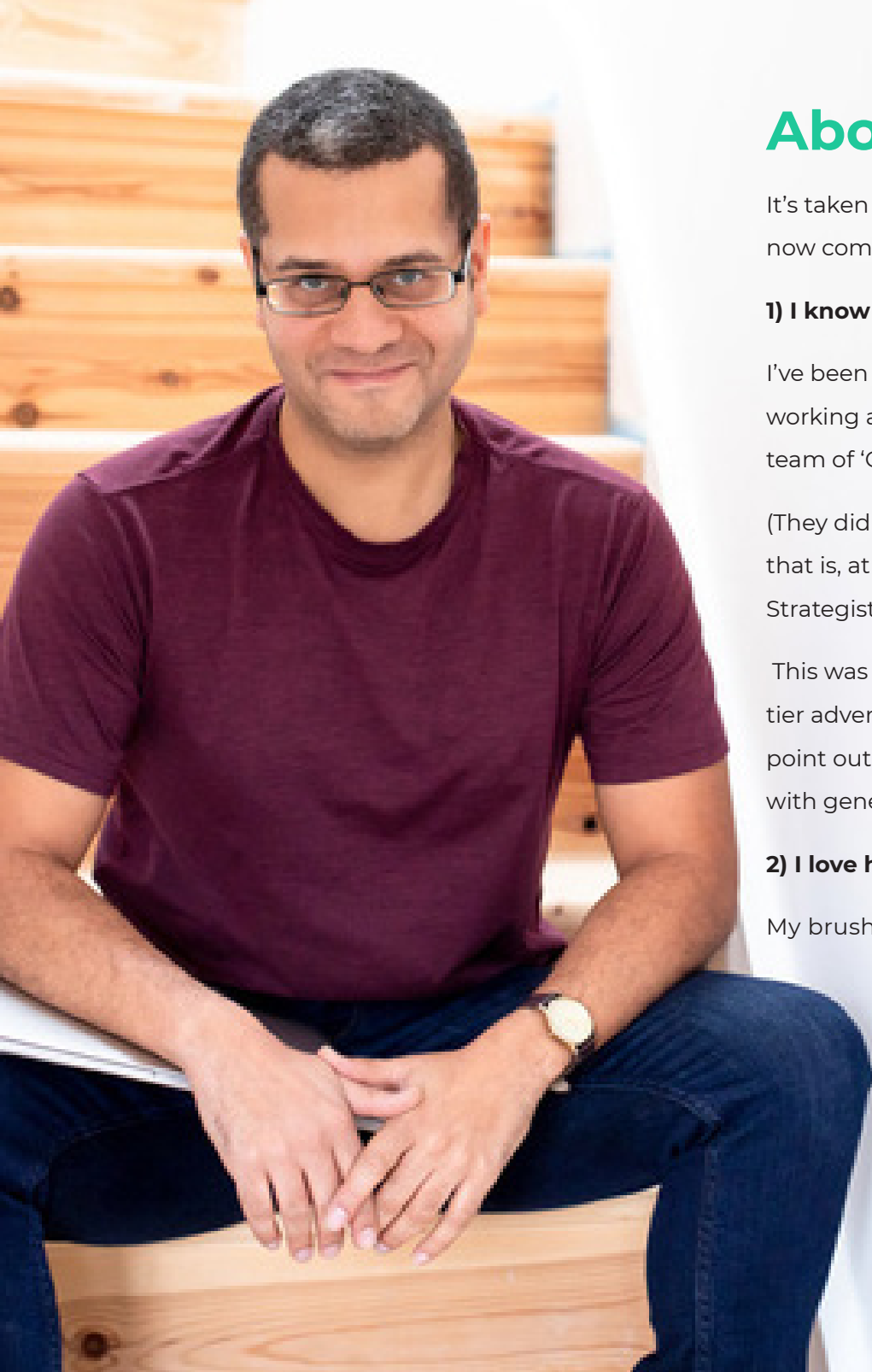
About Phil

It's taken a while, but two things about me are now combining, with happy results.

1) I know my way around Google Ads

I've been at it since 2004, when I started working at Google UK, joining their small team of 'Creative Maximisers'.

(They did eventually realise how silly a job title that is, at which point we became 'Account Strategists')

This was a specialist team dealing with top-tier advertisers only (as I am compelled to point out, thanks to our 'mixed' experiences with general Google Ads support...).

2) I love helping people learn

My brushes with the world of teaching (teaching English as a foreign language in my late teens... a tutoring gig shortly after university, agency training while at Google) have all been positive, and given me a lasting impression of what - deep down - I find most satisfying as a way to spend my time.

Since stepping into the educational side of paid search in 2018 (with my YouTube channel, Facebook group, course and membership) I've been able to bring this part of my life into my working days... and I'm grateful for it.

Any questions? Feel free to send me an email! **phil@ppc-strategist.co.uk**